Interpretations of Unity:
Hermeneutics in ŚĀKYA MCHOG LDAN's Interpretation of the Five Treatises of Maitreya

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Abstract

This dissertation is a study of the process through which Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, by synthesizing doctrines and texts into consistent models, integrates views of reality within doctrinal and soteriological systems. It consists of an analysis of the most fundamental doctrinal tension found in the Tibetan tradition, namely the apparent inconsistency of doctrines belonging to the negative Mādhyamika and to the more affirmative Yogācāra trends of Mahāyāna Buddhism. As a case study aiming to provide a first systematic examination of that problematic, the dissertation surveys and analyzes Tibetan interpretation of the set of texts referred to as the Five Treatises of Maitreya (*byams chos sde lnga*), and at the way those interpretations deal with the doctrinal tensions found in that set of text. In addition to providing a recension of major interpretations of the Five Treatises developed between 1100 and 1500, a detailed account is given of the model of interpretation given by gSer mdog Paṇ chen Śākya mchog ldan, a famous teacher of the Sa skya school of Tibetan Buddhism. When confronted with the features of other interpretations, Śākya mchog ldan's interpretation of the Five Treatises, which proceeds primarily by allowing a plurality of views to be maintained even at the level of definitive meaning, , provides us with a new insight in the Tibetan philosophical tradition: the most fundamental dimension of philosophical reconciliation of doctrinal views, especially of the kind found in the Five Treatises, can be described as pertaining to textual hermeneutics. Moreover, Śākya mchog ldan's contribution to that domain of Buddhist thought, by placing hermeneutics at the very centre of his system of Buddhist doctrine and practice, suggests that hermeneutics is a fundamental category of all Buddhist philosophical

debates, and that it should be part of any attempt to understand the Tibetan philosophical tradition.

La présente thèse consiste en une étude du processus par lequel la philosophie bouddhiste tibétaine intègre des descriptions de la réalité au sein de systèmes doctrinaires et sotériologiques, c'est-à-dire en effectuant la synthèse de différentes doctrines et textes. Elle présente une analyse du plus important sujet de tension doctrinaire de la tradition tibétaine : les contradictions apparaissant au sein des deux courant principaux du bouddhisme Mahāyāna, le Madhyamaka et le Yogācāra. Cette problématique n'ayant pas jusqu'ici été étudiée systématiquement, la thèse propose une étude de cas visant à en produire, pour la première fois une analyse systématique. Le cas étudié est celui des interprétations tibétaines du groupe de texte appelé les cinq Traités de Maitreya (*byams chos sde lnga*), en particulier de la façon dont ces interprétations parviennent à résoudre les tensions doctrinaires présentes dans ces textes. Outre un résumé et une analyse des plus importantes interprétations de ces textes produites approximativement entre les années 1100 et 1500, la thèse fournit une exposition détaillée de l'interprétation développée par gSer mdog Paṇ chen Śākya mchog ldan, un célèbre auteur appartenant à l'école Sa skya du bouddhisme tibétain. Lorsque comparée aux autres principales interprétations, l'approche construite par Śākya mchog ldan, qui repose sur la possibilité pour une multitude de perspectives de cohabiter, même au sein du sens définitif, nous révèle une nouvelle facette de la tradition philosophique tibétaine: l'herméneutique textuelle joue un rôle fondamental dans l'organisation des doctrines bouddhistes, et en particulier dans le type de débat ayant lieu autour des cinq Traités. De plus Śākya mchog ldan, en plaçant

l'herméneutique au centre de son système d'interprétation et de pratique de la doctrine bouddhiste, nous suggère que l'herméneutique représente une dimension fondamentale de toute forme de philosophie bouddhiste.

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Abbreviations

Classical Indian and Tibetan Sources.

AA	*Abhisamayālaṅkāra*
MSA	*Mahāyāna-Sūtrālaṇkāra*
MV	*Madhyāntavibhāga*
DDV	*Dharmadharmatāvibhaṅga*
RGV	*Ratnagotravibhāga/Mahāyāna-Uttaratantra*
MS	*Mahāyāna-Saṃgraha*
AS	*Abhidharmasamuccaya*
YB	*Yogācār(y)abhūmi*
SNS	*Saṃdhinirmocana-Sūtra*
MMK	*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*
MAV	*Madhyamakāvatāra*
MA	*Madhyamaka-ālaṃkāra*
DTN	*Deb ther sngon po (Blue Annals)*

Texts by Śākya mchog ldan:

BCN	*Byams chos lnga'i nges don rab tu gsal ba*
BBT	*dByu ma'i byung tshul rnam par bshad pa'i gtam yid bzhin lhun po*
BCL	*Byams chos lnga'i lam rim gsal bar byed pa'i bstan bcos rin chen sgrom gyi sgo 'byed*
NDG	*Nges don rgya mtsho*
DTC	*Nges don rgya mtsho'i 'grel pa bdud rtsi'i char bebs*
YZD	*Sgom chen ye shes bzang po'i dris lan*
PYS	*sPring yig gi rnam par bshad pa*
TTS	*Tshad ma'i bstan bcos kyi shin rta'i srol rnams ji ltar 'byung ba'i tshul gtam du bya ba nyin mor byed pa'i snang bas dpyod ldan mtha' dag dga' bar byed pa*

Technical note :

In this dissertation I transliterate Tibetan words and passages using the Wylie transliteration system; Sanskrit letters that appear in Tibetan text and names are transliterated using standard diacritics (e.g., Śākya mchog ldan). When dealing with proper names of persons and places, in order to palliate for the inability of systems of transliterations of Tibet to indicate how words are pronounced, I capitalize the main letter of the name rather than the first letter. When quoting words in the body of the text I give first, where available, the Sanskrit original phrase followed by the Tibetan expression (e.g., *śūnyatā,* Tib., *stong pa nyid*). When quoting from Tibetan sources, the original Tibetan is provided in the footnotes. Unless specified, all translations are my

own. When useful, the title of commonly encountered texts is translated the first time they are mentioned, following which they are referred to by abbreviations. In order to avoid confusion, I do not refer to Tibetan texts using a translation of their title alone. In footnotes, Tibetan texts are referred to by their title alone. Their publication information can be found in the bibliography.

Introduction

1. Context

In his *Bhāvanākrama,* which the Tibetan tradition recognizes as his written summary of his debate with the Hwa shang Mo ho yen, Kamalaśīla describes thus the cultivation of insight (*prajñā,* Tib., *shes rab)* on the gradual path towards enlightenment:

> ...having cultivated absorption in order to fully purify generosity and so forth, make increasing efforts to produce insight. To do so, first, you should cultivate for some time the insight arisen from listening and, using that for some time, completely understand the meaning of scripture. Then, by means of the insight that arose from reflection, perfectly distinguish definitive and provisional meaning. Then, relying on the meaning that is fully disclosed by those, cultivate the meaning of what is completely true. [...]
>
> Thus, with the insight of reflection, analyzing by means of reason and scripture, meditate on the nature of completely true reality.[1]

[1] *Bhavanakrama,* sDe dge dBu ma ki, 28a, "De bas na sbyin pa la sogs pa yongs su dag bar bya ba'i phyir mnyam par gzhag pa la gnas par byas la / shes rab bskyed pa la je 'bad par bya'o / de la thog mar re zhig thos pa las byung ba'i shes rab bskyed par bya ste / des re zhig lung gi don kun tu 'dzin par byed do / de nas bsams pa las byung ba'i shes rab kyis nges pa dang drang ba'i don rnam par 'byed par byed do / de nas des bye brag phyed pa'i don la brten nas yang dag pa kho na'i don bsgom par bya'o /"

This passage can be taken as a summary of Tibetan Buddhism as a whole; more particularly, though, it gives the essence of what is now commonly called "Buddhist philosophy": an intricate synthesis of religious cultivation, meditative absorption, studying and scriptural interpretation, and rational analysis. The nature of the phenomenon described by Kamalaśīla as the cultivation of insight includes enough elements we do not usually directly associate with philosophy, such as scriptural interpretation and meditative absorption, to question the validity of the expression "Buddhist philosophy" itself. More importantly, though, it gives a clear picture of the complexity of the relation found, in Tibetan Buddhism, between reason, scripture and religious practice: reality should be taken as the object of meditation, but only after it has been properly analyzed and understood by means of scripture and reason. Scripture itself is thus not only a source of religious doctrine, but a tool for the analysis of reality. On the other hand, the meaning of scripture itself is to be analyzed by reason in order to determine correctly its meaning, so that scripture is both a tool for analyzing reality and the object of rational analysis. Finally, it is important to note that, in this particular passage, there is no notion that rational analysis approaches reality other than through scripture. The passage rather suggests that reason cannot approach reality apart from the theoretical categories that are provided in scripture. We might forget, as we engage in Buddhist philosophy, that the subjects of Buddhist philosophical debates, such as emptiness, ultimate and relative truths and so forth, most of the time are some particular concepts of doctrine provided in Buddhist scriptures.

It is fair to say that, in the last few decades, the academic study of Tibetan thought has made great progress as to the understanding of that tradition: we have gained a refined understanding not only of the philosophical issues that arise in the context of Tibetan Buddhism, but also of the place of scripture in those debates and their relevance for Buddhist practice. We have a good understanding of the key texts used by Tibetans to define their doctrinal and philosophical position, and we even have access to academic studies of the major Tibetan interpretations of those texts.

Despite that progress, our understanding of the Tibetan tradition is still impeded by a fundamental limitation: our understanding of the major doctrinal and philosophical issues has not yet extended to a full-fledged understanding of the place those issues occupy in the tradition as a whole. The Tibetan tradition is more than a sophisticated system of interpretation of, for example, Madhyamaka philosophy. It sees itself as a continuation of the Nālandā tradition of Indian Buddhism, a system built around Madhyamaka philosophy, but comprising many elements that do not depend directly on it, but that are nonetheless organized around it to form a complete religious system. Elements that at first sight seem disparate, such as the rules of monastic discipline, tantric ritual, and detailed descriptions of the Buddhist path are all organized into a significant system, both as a world view and as a model for study and practice. We do understand many of those elements of the Tibetan tradition, but we still lack a clear picture of exactly how they fit together.

In the context of the picture of Buddhist philosophy given above by Kamalaśīla, this lack takes the form of an unequal understanding of the different aspects of Buddhist philosophy. We do have a sophisticated understanding of how rational analysis is

applied to reality, for example in Mādhyamika dialectics; we do understand how the view of reality that emerges of that analysis is related to religious practice, for example as the place of superior vision (*vipaśyana,* Tib., *lhag mthong*) in a general gradual path (*lam rim),* or as a rationale for meditative experience of reality; where our knowledge is incomplete, though, is mostly in the details of how these elements relate to reason as applied to scriptural interpretation. The identification of the "nature of true reality" (*yang dag pa'i kho na)* referred to by Kamalaśīla[2], is of course done by rational analysis and evaluated on the basis of what we could call philosophical criteria, i.e., the purely logical consistency of the theory of reality that is developed. A study of those theories is doubtless useful to our understanding of the tradition. Yet there is more to those debates than the search for rational consistency: the Tibetan tradition demands of a successful philosophical position that it provides a cogent and convincing reading of the scriptures that present that reality. It is on this point that our understanding of the tradition is incomplete: we mostly neglect an important aspect of that need for a cogent reading of scripture, namely that a successful Tibetan theory of reality not only needs to maintain consistency with a general system of Buddhist practice or with one particular scripture, but it also needs to create a cogent and convincing organization of that theory of reality around Buddhist scripture and practice *in general.* For example, even if one were to come up with a logically consistent reading of the theory of emptiness, if that theory did not allow for the integration of that emptiness to be practically approached, both in rational analysis and in meditation, it would not form an adequate interpretation of emptiness, for it would fail to allow for the integration of

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[2] See above, p. 14.

non-philosophical elements. In fact, we can even say that the Tibetan world view assumes that if a theory of emptiness does not fit into a system of religious practice, it is impossible for it to be fully logically consistent. Reality, in the Indo-Tibetan world view, transpires not only as being consistent with logical expressions (following an acceptance of the logical principle of identity), but also as being, by its very nature, recognizable. In brief, for Tibetan Buddhists, reality is both an objective state of things—the empty nature of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*—and a soteriological goal, the enlightenment that fully realizes it. Even though it is established by means of logical consistency, reality must ultimately lend itself to be experienced by enlightenment, lest it become useless.

One of the typically scholastic assumptions of the Indo-Tibetan tradition is that it considers the canon of Buddhist scripture not only as complete but as thoroughly meaningful and purposeful[3]: there is no useless Buddhist teaching.[4] Every single doctrine found in the Buddhist canon was taught for a specific purpose, and pertains to some useful aspect of the Buddhist path towards enlightenment. Thus, a philosophical theory of reality needs, not only to explain which description of reality is most consistent logically, but also to explain how and why other teachings found in scripture are more or less consistent with that description of reality. In other words, it is not enough for it to say which view is right or wrong; one also needs to explain why it is so, and why the Buddha explained things that do not make full logical sense. Thus,

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[3] This dimension is best represented in the ambiguity of Sanskrit/Tibetan terms *artha/don*, which mean "meaning" as well as "purpose". The point here is that being meaningful means to be also purposeful.
[4] Cf. Cabezón, *Buddhism and Language*, 35. Cabezón quotes, among others, the *Abhidharmakośa's* statement that the 84,000 sections of Buddhist doctrine are taught as antidotes to negative actions.

interpretation of a particular scripture and of the doctrine it conveys cannot be done in isolation from the rest of the canon. It also needs to account for the relationship the scripture and doctrine considered shares with all other doctrines and scriptures.

I have so far referred to "theories of reality" mostly in order to put into mutual contrast certain aspects of Buddhist philosophical debates. The closest Tibetan equivalents to what I am trying to convey here are the notions of view (*dṛṣṭi,* Tib., *lta ba)* and tenet (*siddhāntha,* Tib., *grub mtha'*). "View" is used in different contexts with different meanings: for example as part of the threefold model of view, meditation and conduct (*lta ba, sgom pa, spyod pa*). In the present context, and in Buddhist philosophy in general, we can understand it as an understanding of reality, one's best description of the nature of things. For example, the view of Madhyamaka is expressed as the absence of inherent existence (*rang bzhin med pa*) or as the absence of all conceptual elaborations (*spros pa thams cad dang bral ba* or *spros bral*). In some contexts, "view" has a negative connotation; for example, in his MMK, Nāgārjuna speaks of the Buddha as the one teaching the elimination of all views (*dṛṣṭi),* meaning theories superimposed on reality.[5] Although "tenet" overlaps with "view", it is slightly different in that it suggests, more than a single view, a system of organized views, a kind of super view. Nevertheless, both these terms would represent the aspect of Buddhist philosophy I have been referring to above, namely any kind of description of reality in general, and they can be characterized as being primarily ontological notions, i.e., statements about reality in general.

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[5] MMK, XXVII, 30.

In Tibet, we can safely say that the most popular view and tenet is Madhyamaka. There is of course a great variety of interpretations of that view/tenet; nevertheless, despite our tendency to overstress differences between different interpretations, there is a great degree of consistency even between rival interpretations of the Madhyamaka tenet. For example, except for adepts of Great Madhyamaka (often referred to as other-emptiness or *gzhan stong dbu ma*[6]), almost all Tibetan thinkers since the 14th century agree on the superiority of the interpretation of Madhyamaka that is based on Candrakīrti's treatises, known as Consequentialist (*thal gyur ba*[7]) Madhyamaka. The main feature of the rational procedure that participates in that view is that it is critical: it mostly analyzes ontological theories of all kinds, showing them to be untenable, thus establishing emptiness. Thus, to refer to the model of cultivation described above by Kamalaśīla, in Madhyamaka one would analyze descriptions of reality made in scripture and check whether they can be proven to be logically inconsistent.[8]

That critical function of reason, which corresponds to analysis of theories of reality, does not exhaust all the uses of reason in Tibetan Buddhism. The kind of rational procedure that is required to fulfill the other aspect of Buddhist philosophy we have mentioned above, namely tying up views of reality with practical function (mostly meditation) and scriptural interpretation, functions in the opposite way. Whereas

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[6] This dissertation, which deals in great deal with the thought of Śākya mchog ldan, will follow his interpretation of that term as making the terms other-emptiness (*gzhan stong),* Great Madhyamaka (*dbu ma chen po*) and Alīkākāra-Yogācāra/Alīkākāra-Madhyamaka (*rnam rdzun pa'i rnal 'byor spyod pa/dbu ma*). See chapter for a detailed discussion of those terms.
[7] That term has been reconstructed (and widely used) as Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka.
[8] See above, p. 14. The categorization of Madhyamaka, and the discourse of emptiness and no-self (*anātman)* in general, has been described by thinkers of "Critical Buddhism", such as Hakamaya and Matsumoto, as the only authentic Buddhist doctrines. For a summary of those discussions, see *Pruning the Bodhi Tree.*

theories of reality, in Tibetan Buddhism, are for the most part analyzed critically, models of practice and the interpretation of scriptures are treated with a kind of reason that I would characterize as *synthetic*: rather than looking for logical contradictions, it seeks to provide ways to resolve those contradictions, or at least to explain why they arise. That aspect of the use of reason in Tibetan Buddhism is more creative than critical: it seeks ways of organizing doctrines together so as to create a consistent whole including views, practices and their source, scripture.[9]

I suggest that, although we understand quite well the different views advocated by different actors of Tibetan Buddhism, as well as how they are grounded in scriptures and defined vis-à-vis each other, we understand very little the process by which these views are synthesized into full-fledged religious systems. In comparison to the different procedures of critical reason, we understand very little the procedures of reconciliation of scriptures and doctrines. The goal of this dissertation is to make a first step in compensating for that lack in our understanding of the Tibetan tradition. It takes as its main object, not particular interpretations of Buddhist doctrines, but interpretations of the relationship between Buddhist doctrines. Thus, in a sense, this dissertation takes a step back from the majority of studies of Tibetan philosophical debates so as to widen our perspective on Tibetan Buddhist philosophy.

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[9] I certainly do not want to suggest that, in Tibetan Buddhism, critical reason is not related to scriptural interpretation. The dialectics of emptiness are also strongly rooted in exegetical and hermeneutical debates. I would rather claim that, in addition to the hermeneutical concern of identifying the final view of the Buddha, Buddhist hermeneutics also demands an explanation of the place that final view occupies within Buddhist doctrine and scripture in general.

Now if, as we claim, the process of synthesizing different parts of the Buddhist tradition is as fundamental as critical reason is, it is unrealistic to hope to solve the question all at once. This dissertation therefore suggests, as a first penetration into that aspect of the Tibetan tradition, focusing on a particular instance of the process of synthesizing doctrines and scriptures together, with the hope that what the study shows can be used to orient further research into that issue.

To analyze the process by which doctrines are reconciled and synthesized into a consistent whole, the best subject to take as an example of such a problematic imposed itself as the most fundamental doctrinal tension found in the Tibetan tradition, namely the one between the two main doctrinal trends found in the Indian Mahāyāna tradition and inherited by Tibetans, Madhyamaka and Yogācāra[10]. These trends are significantly different on many levels: to name but a few points, they differ fundamentally in the history of their lineage and the mythology surrounding their founders, Nāgārjuna and Maitreya/Asaṅga; in their main doctrines, Madhyamaka's theory of emptiness and Yogācāra's concepts of non dual gnosis and buddha nature; and in their general ontological orientations, negation and affirmation. I do not mean, by identifying those two trends in such a way, to suggest any kind of claim as to the precise definition of those categories as distinct, as to their identification as closed, historically defined systems of thought. I simply use those categories to represent general tendencies found in the Indian Mahāyāna tradition, with a great degree of fluidity[11], as recognized

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[10] For the identification of the main features of those trends, see below, ch. 1.

[11] For example, although we can identify the concept of buddha nature with Yogācāra thought, it is very present in Madhyamaka also. In addition, buddha nature texts and doctrines certainly arose as quite

by the Tibetan tradition itself. It is enough for our purpose that Tibetans recognize those two trends, some degree of inconsistency between them, and the need to attempt a reconciliation.

Since the relationship between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra in the Tibetan tradition in itself is a vast topic, I propose here a case study of a limited number of scriptures, and the doctrines they teach, that encapsulates that fundamental doctrinal tension. The set of scriptures that serves best that purpose is no doubt the category of texts called by Tibetans the Five Treatises of Maitreya (*Byams chos sde lnga*). Given the fact that the texts put together in that category contain doctrines belonging to both trends, and given the general importance of those texts for the Tibetan tradition[12], the way they are interpreted gives us an incomplete yet extremely revealing picture of how actors of the Tibetan tradition deal with the tension between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra doctrines.

Now though the Five Treatises provide us with the best possible subject for a case study, the sheer amount of material dealing with their interpretation forces us to further limit the scope of our attention. In fact the Tibetan commentarial literature on only one of the Five Treatises, the *Abhisamayālaṇkāra* (AA), would by itself fill several bookshelves. I therefore limit the case study to Tibetan interpretations of the Five Treatises produced between the time when that collection was introduced in Tibet, i.e., starting with rNgog Blo ldan shes rab's (1059-1109, otherwise known as rNgog Lotsāwa

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distinct from Yogācāra. In the same way, we can identify many features of the Buddhist epistemological tradition, such as the rejection of external material reality, with Yogācāra; yet the epistemological tradition has been espoused by Mādhyamika at least since Bhavya/Bhāvaviveka. Moreover, even the Yogācāra model of the three natures/characteristics teaches a model of emptiness.

[12] The explanation of their place and importance is given below, ch. 1.

or rNgog lo) translation of the *Ratnagotravibhāga (*RGV*)* around the end of the 11th century, until the beginning of the 16th century, when gSer mdog Paṇ chen Śākya mchog ldan (1428-1507) composed his last commentary on the Five Treatises. It is important to note that I do not propose a study of Tibetan interpretations of each text in particular; rather, I propose a study of studies of the Five Treatises as a whole, i.e., a summary of the major strategies used to reconcile the doctrinal tensions found in those texts.

As for the reasons for choosing that particular time period, the starting date could hardly be established otherwise, for it is with the introduction of the RGV and the *Dharmadharmatāvibhaṅga* (DDV) in Tibet that the category of the Five Treatises comes into existence. Although rNgog lo is not the only translator of the RGV, only his translation is now extant; in any case the other translations of the RGV we know have been made either by younger contemporaries or by later figures.[13] Since our sampling of interpretations of the Five Treatises benefits by starting as early as possible, we establish it at the time when, at least in Tibet, both the concept of the Five Treatises and the texts themselves first become available.

The closing date of the period we will look at is not as self-explanatory, and several reasons support choosing Śākya mchog ldan as our last informant. First, he lived close to the end of the period which Ruegg calls the "classical-systematic"[14]. That places Śākya mchog ldan at the end of the period during which each major Tibetan doctrinal

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[13] See below, chapter 2.
[14] Ruegg, *Studies in Indian and Tibetan Madhyamaka Thought*, 3-7.

school developed its model of interpretation of Mahāyāna doctrine in general. Thus, Śākya mchog ldan is in a historical position that allows him to appreciate, not only the thinkers of the classical period, such as Sa skya Paṇḍita, but also those of the early classical-systematic period, such as Dol po pa and Tsong kha pa, but also of the late part of that period, such as rGyal tshab dar ma rin chen and Go rams pa, his contemporary. Since in many ways Śākya mchog ldan's interpretation of the Five Treatises can be seen as a response to the major trends of interpretation developed before his time, it is suitable to have him close the sample, so to speak. In addition, the features of the systems of doctrine developed at that period are such that thinkers of that period represent turning points in the history of Tibetan doctrinal schools. On one hand, actors like Tsong kha pa and Śākya mchog ldan take the task of system building further than it had been done before, and create very integrated systems of interpretation of the whole corpus of Buddhist doctrine. On the other, in many cases, thinkers of later generations seem to build on the foundations established during that period and expand their ramifications rather than develop new systems.[15]

Second, the details of Śākya mchog ldan's interpretation are such that we are forced to treat his interpretation as a topic (and chapter) in itself: because his model of interpretation displays features radically different from all others and thus can serve as a point of comparison for the majority of other interpretations, it makes sense to treat his views as the latest remarks of a long conversation that took place over five centuries. Also, Śākya mchog ldan's system of interpretation could arguably be

[15] As Ruegg notes, the later "post-classical scholastic" period deals mostly with the application of the models developed in the classical-systematic to new areas. See Ibid., 6.

described as the one which takes the most seriously the task of synthesizing the different doctrinal trends of Mahāyāna into a consistent whole. His system of interpretation and his discussion of the hermeneutics that support it are more complete and explicit than those found in previous generations. As a sign that that concern is central to his thought, Śākya mchog ldan makes the Five Treatises of Maitreya the scriptural source that governs his whole system of interpretation of the Mahāyāna. For all those reasons, and due to the fact that his position is unique and hence demands more explanation, Śākya mchog ldan's interpretation of the Five Treatises gets more attention than others; thus, it serves as the topic of chapters 3 and 4, in addition to being presented in Appendix 1, which provides a translation of relevant sections of Śākya mchog ldan's main treatise on the meaning of the Five Treatises, the *Byams chos lnga'i nges don rab tu gsal ba (Thorough Clarification of the Definitive Meaning of the Five Treatises,* BCN). Thus, this dissertation presents a case study within a case study: our case study of the interpretations of the Five Treatises contains itself a case study of Śākya mchog ldan's interpretation.

Since a thorough exposition of the details of the life of Śākya mchog ldan, the main elements of the historical context in which he worked, and his place in general vis-à-vis his own Sa skya school and others is already available[16], there is no need to repeat these elements here. I would stress, nonetheless, a few elements and events that are particularly relevant to our understanding of his contribution. First, although Śākya mchog ldan grew within the Sa skya order of Tibetan Buddhism and was considered

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[16] Komarovski, *Echoes of Empty Luminosity: Reevaluation and Unique Interpretation of Yogācāra and Niḥsvabhāvavāda Madhyamaka by the Fifteenth Century Tibetan Thinker Śākya mchog ldan*, chap. 1.

one of its members, he had an ambivalent relationship with other members of the order. He was criticized for raising critical questions about Sa skya Paṇḍita's *sDom gsum rab dbye* (*Distinguishing the Three Vows)*; although he denied wanting to undermine the authority of the Sa skya hierarch, he was nonetheless perceived as unorthodox. Even though he later resolved his own qualms about Sa paṇ, somewhat downplaying the critical nature of his questions, he was undoubtedly fundamentally questioning some of Sa paṇ's views, especially on the buddha nature.[17] He was also involved in controversy with dGe lugs pa thinkers and following his teacher Rong ston remains, even to this day, known as one of the fiercest critiques of Tsong kha pa's Madhyamaka system.[18] We need also to mention the fact that he experienced difficulties due to sectarian tensions. He suffered somewhat from a development in the dynamics of Tibetan Buddhist sectarian debates where identity as member of an order became associated with doxographical approaches.[19] Komarovski, who studied in detail the life of Śākya mchog ldan, especially as depicted in Kun dga' grol mchog's biography, summarizes thus his general reaction to developments happening at his time:

> His predominant attitude to those changes was clearly negative, expressing feelings of disappointment and longing for an apparent unity of various systems of Buddhist thought and practice which had been disrupted by the emergence of new ideologies. His feelings were obviously affected by such elements as institutional and political rivalry [...]. But being a refined thinker exploring the

[17] Ibid., 50-51. For Sa paṇ's views on buddha nature, see below, ch. 2.
[18] Ibid., 52.
[19] Ibid., 20.

> expanse of the Buddhist doctrinal universe, he was strongly interested in the intellectual basis for those changes.[20]

As we shall see, Śākya mchog ldan's interpretation of the Five Treatises displays the same attitude, namely a search for integration of various elements of the Buddhist tradition by means of creative hermeneutics not bound by any tradition's limited approach.

The main conclusion we can draw from a comparison of major Tibetan interpretations of the Five Treatises in the period identified with that of Śākya mchog ldan is that the different views of the doctrinal tensions found in the Five Treatises cannot be explained as philosophical differences about views, i.e., as inconsistent ontological views. Although Śākya mchog ldan disagrees with mostly everyone else's interpretation of these texts, he does not criticize the ontological view of the system they defend. In fact he presents it as a fully valid and authoritative ontological view. Where he differs is on the way other interpreters of the Five Treatises use a particular ontological standpoint, more particularly that of *niḥsvabhāvavāda* (essencelessness) Madhyamaka, as a standard of interpretation of all Buddhist scripture. Thus, as a result of this investigation of interpretations of the Five Treatises, we can claim that debates regarding those texts cannot be explained based on ontological grounds. They must be understood as debates happening within the field of textual hermeneutics, i.e.,

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[20] Ibid., 57.

reflection on the rules and principles for textual interpretation. Divergent views about the Five Treatises flow out of a hermeneutical disagreement: while the majority of authors agree to base their solution to the tension found in the Five Treatises on a privileging of the Madhyamaka view of emptiness as a preferred standpoint for interpretation of all doctrines, Śākya mchog ldan claims that this is not a valid strategy of interpretation, and that it must be replaced by a sympathetic reading of sources based on the original practical–i.e., soteriological–context for which they were given, and not a pre-identified preferred standpoint.

Thus our case study of the use of reason for reconciling apparently conflicting doctrines found in the Mahāyāna tradition points strongly in the direction of textual hermeneutics as the main form of reasoning at work in the process of synthesizing the Mahāyāna doctrines and scriptures. If we are to understand the part of Buddhist philosophy that up to now was neglected, the organization and synthesis of divergent elements into a consistent whole, and the process through which this is done, we need to turn our attention away from ontological debates, and focus rather on debates happening with textual hermeneutics. Such a study may also reveal important facets not only of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, but of the place of hermeneutics in the development of Asian religious thought as a whole. That could then lead to valuable insight into the development of traditions in general.

2. Buddhist Hermeneutics: Literature Review

We will thus look at Buddhist textual hermeneutics of the Five Treatises of Maitreya as a case study to inform us on synthesis in Buddhist philosophy. To my knowledge this

present dissertation is the first study of these texts as a category. There have been numerous studies of the individual texts that form the Five Treatises, including some study of their reception and interpretation in the Tibetan tradition; these are reviewed extensively in chapter 2. But so far academic scholarship has not taken seriously enough the Tibetan tradition that the Five Treatises form a unit to undertake scholarly research on that topic. It is no coincidence that neither the topic of the organization of the various Mahāyāna doctrines nor the category of the Five Treatises have been thoroughly researched for, as is made clear in chapter 1, those two topics are intimately connected.

Since we are proposing textual hermeneutics as a useful category to understand what is taking place in Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, it is helpful at this point to review the scholarship on Buddhist hermeneutics in general as the basis on which this dissertation builds.

There have been numerous efforts made at understanding Buddhist hermeneutics, starting as early as Étienne Lamotte's 1947 and 1949 articles "La critique d'authenticité dans le bouddhisme"[21] and "La critique d'interprétation dans le bouddhisme."[22]

The term "hermeneutics"[23], which sprang from modern western philosophical literature, cannot be used in the context of Buddhism without some explanation of why and how it applies also to Buddhism. At first, it may seem that the expression

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[21] Lamotte, "La critique d'authenticité dans le bouddhisme." in *India Antiqua*.
[22] Originally published in the *Annuaire de l'Institut de philologie et d'histoire orientales et slaves,* vol. 9; translated by Sara Boin-Webb as "The Assessment of Textual Interpretation in Buddhism."
[23] A summary of developments within the field of western hermeneutics—a topic which we cannot enter now—is provided in Thiselton, *New horizons in hermeneutics*.

"Buddhist hermeneutics" is an anachronic category mistake. Yet several scholars have argued—successfully, I would say—that there are significant ways in which that term can be applied to Buddhism. I would distinguish two main approaches to the use of the category hermeneutics as applying to Buddhism. First, there are similarities, especially with regards to textual hermeneutics, between what is at work in the Buddhist tradition and the native environment of western hermeneutics, for example with Christian hermeneutics of doctrine and scripture, so that some realities of the Buddhist tradition are best represented by the term hermeneutics. This is no surprise given the deeper resemblance that has been pointed out between the Tibetan tradition and scholasticism in general.[24] Second, scholars have defended a philosophical interpretation of Buddhism in general *as* hermeneutics, thus creating deeper structural links between the Buddhist tradition in general and the modern philosophical tradition of hermeneutics. The following is a review of major contributions to those two types of interpretation.

Although, in the two articles mentioned above, Lamotte did not use the expression hermeneutics, in "The Assessment of Textual Interpretation," he gives a summary of the rules and principles that guide Buddhist textual hermeneutics: the distinction between the Dharma and the person who teaches it, and the principle that "adherence to the doctrine cannot be dependent on human authority."[25] He also introduces the difference between "the spirit" (*artha)* and the letter (*vyañjana*),[26] as well as the

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[24] The main source for this being Cabezón, *Buddhism and Language*.
[25] Lamotte, "The Assessment of Textual Interpretation in Buddhism," 12.
[26] Ibid., 13.

important distinction between "sūtras of precise meaning (*nitārtha)*" and "sūtras which require interpretation (*neyārtha*)"[27], a category we have come to recognize as very fundamental to Buddhist hermeneutics. Finally, he presents the Buddhist principle of favouring "direct knowledge (*jñāna)*" over "discursive consciousness (*vijñāna*)".[28] Thus, quite early in the academic study of Buddhist doctrine, Lamotte was able to present an account of the most fundamental principles of Buddhist textual interpretation, which we could call textual hermeneutics.

Robert Thurman has used the expression "Buddhist hermeneutics" as early as 1978. In his article "Vajra Hermeneutics", following Tsong kha pa, he claimed that "critical reason is the major authority in Buddhist hermeneutics, in virtually all its systems or schools."[29] In the same article, he proposed that a correspondence between reality, the intent of scripture, and one's own experience points to a correspondence between Buddhism and modern hermeneutics:

> In the Buddhist context, although there may be a different view of the mode of operation of divine reality, the situation is otherwise very similar. The Buddha mind *is* the realm of divine reality. The Buddha's speech is thus the bridge between that transcendent wholeness and the dancing fragmentation of life.

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[27] Ibid., 17.
[28] Ibid., 23.
[29] Thurman, "Buddhist Hermeneutics." In "Vajra Hermeneutics,", Thurman says that "even the Buddhist hermeneutics that base themselves on scriptural statements, such as the Idealist hermeneutic based on the *Saṃdhinirmocana*, (Elucidation of the Intention), Chih I's system based on the *Lotus,* Fa Tsang's based on the *Avataṃsaka* (Garland), Honen's based on the *Sukhāvatīvyūha* (Pure Land), and so forth, do so because it seems to them the reasonable thing to do." (120) This seems to suggest that his preferred "Dialecticist" tradition relies on reason rather than scriptural statements; as we will see, the notion that reason and scriptural statements practices should be seen as opposites probably misrepresents Buddhist hermeneutics in general.

> Hermeneutics is thus not at all a merely scholastic enterprise, but is the 'physics' of that Buddha-bridge.[30]

Thus Thurman was one of the first scholars to take the explanation of Buddhist hermeneutics further into a comparison of Buddhism and hermeneutics, concluding that they deeply correspond, even that Buddhism itself can be seen as hermeneutics.

Nathan Katz, in his 1984 piece "Prasaṅga and Deconstruction: Tibetan Hermeneutics and the Yāna Controversy", uses the expression Buddhist hermeneutics to analyze Tsong kha pa's treatment of Buddhist vehicles. Drawing a distinction between text-based hermeneutics and adept-based hermeneutics[31], he also, as the title of the article indicates, compares Prāsaṅgika hermeneutics to Derridian deconstruction.[32] Referring to the categories explained by Lamotte in the article mentioned above, he also mentions that other doctrines, such as that of the three *kāyas*, can be seen as hermeneutical principles.[33] Overall, this article consists of another account of Tsong kha pa's Prāsaṅgika hermeneutic—a reference to the way Tsong kha pa uses critical reasoning to analyze religious doctrines—, which Katz describes thus:

> Thoroughly basing his system on the Mādhyamaka, he is able to deconstruct all referential tendencies underlying the use of language, allowing for the free play of the signifier in a skillful, pedagogic proliferation of methods.[34]

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[30] Ibid., 143-144.
[31] Katz, "Prasaṅga and Deconstruction."
[32] Ibid., 186-188.
[33] Ibid., 201.
[34] Ibid., 201-202.

Katz's study is interesting in that it goes beyond the description of hermeneutical principles into an analysis of how they are used in a specific context. In addition, the link he sees between Buddhism and hermeneutics is more specific than the general identification we have seen Thurman make: he links Prāsaṅgika hermeneutics to a particular hermeneutical model, Derridian deconstruction.

John Maraldo, in his 1986 article "Hermeneutics and Historicity in the Study of Buddhism"[35], sums up the state of Buddhist hermeneutics up to his time, noting a surge of interest for the topic in the late 1970s and early 1980s.[36] The important contribution of that article is its definition of the way in which we can use the expression Buddhist hermeneutics:

> From the perspective of modern Western hermeneutics, these schemes would be "hermeneutical" only in a very qualified sense. They would need at least to show some degree of reflection upon methods of interpreting or classifying scriptures. To qualify for the designation "hermeneutical" in a more restricted sense, they would need to be cognizant of understanding as a mode of being, and of language as essential to experience. Even Thurman's initial definition of hermeneutics as "a philosophical discipline of rational interpretation of a traditional canon of Sacred Scriptures authoritative for a religious community' * seems closer to a definition of scriptural exegesis than of hermeneutics. [37]

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[35] *The Eastern Buddhist*, 19, 1, 1986.
[36] Maraldo, "Hermeneutics and Historicity in the Study of Buddhism," 17.
[37] Ibid., 24-25.

Maraldo provides us with a good working definition of precisely what we can count as Buddhist hermeneutics, especially in contrast to the simpler task of exegesis:

> In short, it is an exegetical exercise to give a systematic interpretation of a text or to arrange texts systematically; it would be a hermeneutical exercise to determine the methods and bounds of interpretation, to consider the validity of textual classifications, or to construct a general theory of interpretation.[38]

Maraldo then defends the methodological claim that we also, as interpreters of the same texts, need to define our own hermeneutical model:

> We must do more than present Yogacarin and Svatrantikan hermeneutics, the hermeneutics of Tsong-kha-pa or Tsung-mi or Kükai; we must at the same time reflect upon and articulate how we come to understand their respective teachings.[39]

Maraldo then proceeds to discuss the place of historicity in the Buddhist tradition as informing our own method of reading Buddhist texts, touching areas less directly related to our present study, such as Kyoto school philosophy.

In a study of the theory of interpretation developed by the 19th century Tibetan thinker 'Ju Mi pham, in addition to some details about the specifics of Mi pham's system, Matthew Kapstein has proposed that Buddhism itself could be defined as hermeneutics, a category that embraces the domains of both scripture of realization, "for it is through

[38] Ibid., 26.
[39] Ibid., 30.

the interpretive act that scripture on the one hand and reality on the other are in fact comprehended" [40]; in relation to Mi pham's theory of interpretation, he notes that, for him, "the principles of interpretation are really no different from the principles of Buddhist philosophy overall. I believe this is as it should be."[41] He summarizes the ways into which Buddhism is hermeneutical in the following way:

> Buddhism is hermeneutical in that it demands that we confront and come to understand the message of the Sugatas; it is hermeneutical in that it requires a reinterpretation of the world within which we find ourselves and equally a redefinition of ourselves within that world; and it is hermeneutical in that it will not allow us to remain silent, but demands that we enunciate, that is, interpret for others, the message and the reality with which we have struggled.[42]

In a similar way, John Powers has suggested that we can speak of Buddhist hermeneutics because some of the debates, such notably as those found in the *Saṃdhinirmocana Sūtra* (SNS), apply not only to the rules of interpretation of Buddhist text, but to a reflection on these rules, and to the fact that these rules of interpretation further apply to one's general experience of reality.[43]

There are great similarities between the claims of the different authors who claim that Buddhism as a whole can be understood as hermeneutics: those theories start from the general principle, accepted in a modern definition of hermeneutics, that hermeneutics

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[40] Kapstein, "Mipham's Theory of Interpretation," 165.
[41] Ibid.
[42] "Mi-pham's Theory of Interpretation", 166.
[43] Powers, Hermeneutics and Tradition in the Saṃdhinirmocanasūtra, 98-99.

do not apply simply to the interpretation of meaning given in scripture, but to any kind of reality. Under such a definition, any attempt to understand anything can be reduced to hermeneutics. Since Buddhism does undoubtedly contain such a notion of understanding reality, it is therefore no big claim to identify it with such a wide definition of hermeneutics. In other words, once all attempts at talking about reality are identified as hermeneutics, the question that remains is rather what does *not* count as hermeneutics.

José Cabezón also uses "hermeneutics" to refer to the Tibetan Buddhist tradition (which he labels as "scholastic"). In his discussion of Buddhist hermeneutics he comes back to a more traditional understanding of hermeneutics as textual hermeneutics—without, though, explicit specification, for he uses simply "hermeneutics". He talks of hermeneutics as "the application of reason to the analysis and reconciliation of inconsistency, scriptural and otherwise",[44] noting the importance of that endeavor for the Tibetan tradition. His discussion of Buddhism and hermeneutics is thus more limited and, in a way, modest, as he is more interested to compare Tibetan Buddhism with scholasticism, hermeneutics being but a part of the latter. Cabezón also gives an account of the dGe lugs pa model of reconciliation of contradiction, which is based on the identification of ultimate reality, *qua* emptiness, as corresponding to the category of definitive meaning: for Tsong kha pa, definitive teachings are those that refer to emptiness.[45] Perhaps less fortunate than his explanation of Tibetan Buddhism as scholasticism is Cabezón's claim that the hermeneutic of emptiness just described is

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[44] Buddhism and Language, 55.
[45] Cabezón, *Buddhism and Language*, 60.

"characteristic of Madhyamaka thought in general."[46] As we will see through this dissertation, this is not the case, and a challenge of that hermeneutic is precisely what defines doctrinal systems that identify themselves as being part of Madhyamaka but not centred exclusively on the doctrine of emptiness.

Finally, Dreyfus has also compared the nature and function of Buddhist hermeneutics to similar practices from the Jewish tradition, especially with regards to polysemic interpretation, which he does not recognize in the Tibetan tradition.[47] Again, Dreyfus's discussion of the topic focuses on the resolution of contradiction as the main focus of Buddhist hermeneutics. Dreyfus's discussion of the topic is made in the context of the Tibetan educational culture rather than as a description of the philosophical tradition in general.

Although this dissertation deals for the most part with Buddhist hermeneutics, it is not a study of Buddhist hermeneutical theory. In other words, it does not present elements of Buddhist theory of interpretation in the way Lamotte or Kapstein did. Rather, it is a study of what we could call "applied hermeneutics": the way principles of Buddhist hermeneutical theory are used to interpret doctrines and texts. Our knowledge of the Tibetan tradition is lacking precisely in that area; although for over 60 years now we have been exposed to Buddhist theory of interpretation, we have used too little our knowledge of that theory as a way to enrich our own understanding of the tradition.

[46] Ibid.
[47] Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping*, 189-194.

This dissertation does not present new hermeneutical theories; it does, though, present ways of applying those theories that were up to the present not known.

Having already introduced textual hermeneutics as the concept we propose to use to help us understand Tibetan Buddhist doctrinal debates, it is necessary at this point to define precisely in what sense we use that term. Throughout this dissertation, I will refer to Buddhist hermeneutics as *textual* hermeneutics, corresponding to what Maraldo depicted, namely determining "the methods and bounds of interpretation" and considering "the validity of textual classifications". Whereas Maraldo referred to the construction of a "general theory of interpretation", and that certainly falls within our definition of hermeneutics, that dimension is much less present in the discussions we will study than the other two just mentioned. Hence we will talk of Buddhist textual hermeneutics as a reflection on the methods of interpretation of Buddhist doctrine and scripture, functioning primarily through the reflection on the validity of textual and doxographic classification. In short, we will study the ways into which different thinkers relate together different textual and doctrinal categories in order to develop a successful interpretation of the body of Buddhist scripture.

3. Division of Topics

With such a definition of Buddhist hermeneutics in mind, this dissertation shows how, when looking at Tibetan interpretations of the Five Treatises of Maitreya, it becomes clear that conflicting interpretations arise not as the result of disagreement about ontological views, but as the result of disagreement about what these texts are saying. In other words, different authors agree on how the view of ultimate reality should be

described, but they do not agree on which texts actually describe that view. As a result of the strategies and principles of interpretation they are favoring, interpreters simply do not agree on how those texts should be understood. More particularly, one's stance towards the identification of ultimate reality *qua* emptiness as defining definitive meaning, and using that as a principle of interpretation, distinguished between the major interpretations of the Five Treatises found in the Tibetan tradition.

Chapter 1 proposes the idea that the Five Treatises of Maitreya should be given more consideration as scriptural sources for the Tibetan Madhyamaka tradition, because the way Tibetans of different traditions interpret them provides fundamental features of their general approach to Madhyamaka. As Tibetans universally define their final interpretation based on the Prajñāpāramitā corpus, and as they almost universally interpret that corpus based on Madhyamaka commentarial literature, the fact that the Five Treatises also provide interpretations of the same corpus forces us to consider Madhyamaka readings as answers to readings provided in the Five Treatises. In addition, insofar as the Five Treatises embody the deep tension found between Yogācāra and Madhyamaka elements found in the Tibetan tradition, and given that the way that tension is resolved defines important aspects of Tibetan doctrinal systems, an understanding of how these texts are understood as a set is a necessary but unfortunately missing link of present-day scholarship on Tibetan Madhyamaka.

Chapter 2 looks directly at Tibetan interpretations of the Five Treatises in two steps: a history of the concept of the Five Treatises itself, which for the most part seems to be unique to the late Indian and Tibetan traditions, and a survey of solutions provided by

otherwise influential thinkers to the tension found between different doctrines taught in the Treatises.

The result of that survey is that, while there has been some evolution regarding the use of the category of Five Treatises itself and strategies in interpreting them, the overwhelming majority of Tibetan thinkers follow a similar approach: they take the identification of definitive meaning and emptiness as a principle of interpretation of Yogācāra doctrines found in the Five Treatises, so that whether they conform to the teachings of emptiness defines their status as definitive or provisional. Thus the majority of Tibetan thinkers explain apparently conflicting statements found in the Five Treatises as being contradictory ontological statements, but nevertheless reconcilable through the use of exegetical categories such as the distinction between provisional and definitive meaning or between literal and indirect language. Hence interpretive choices mostly rest on which one of the Five Treatises can be seen as being literally compatible with whatever view one selects as the most authoritative, which for the majority is that of *niḥsvabhāvavāda* Madhyamaka.

Chapter 3 analyzes in detail a particular interpretation of the Five Treatises that stands out as unique precisely because it does not follow the general trend found in other interpretations, namely basing one's reading of the Five Treatises as making ontological statements. Śākya mchog ldan, who does recognize a variety of views within the Five Treatises, nevertheless refuses to reject any set as being more authoritative than the other: he interprets all Five Treatises as definitive. An analysis of his interpretation shows that he does not disagree with other interpreters who read some of the Five Treatises as provisional because he rejects their general ontological position. He rather

rejects it for two reasons: (1) he disagrees with their exegesis of the Five Treatises and, (2) he disagrees with their hermeneutical strategy, i.e., that of using ontological views as a standard of interpretation. Śākya mchog ldan provides a synthesis of various trends found in the Five Treatises based on different purposes attributed to scriptural statements, especially in the context of Buddhist practice. That introduction of practical purpose into the general scheme of interpretation brings about a new understanding of the category "definitive meaning": for Śākya mchog ldan that category seems to refer to a teaching that is valid as a way to attain full buddhahood. Since there is more than one way of doing that, it follows that the category of definitive meaning can include a variety of views and statements, even some that are apparently contradictory when taken out of their practical context. Finally, Śākya mchog ldan's interpretation highlights the fact that other Tibetan thinkers took for granted an exegetical system based on *niḥsvabhāvavāda* Madhyamaka (or, in the case of Dol po pa, Yogācāra/Great Madhyamaka); his exegetical system, on the other hand, is based on an inclusive concern for the whole spectrum of Mahāyāna doctrine. His interpretation of the Five Treatises, in contrast to most others, makes a synthesis based not on a hierarchy of ontological views, but on different parts of the Buddhist path, i.e., different soteriological functions.

Chapter 4 aims at placing the themes encountered in chapter 3 in their proper context by explaining how they fit in the works of Śākya mchog ldan in general. First, it shows how the Five Treatises are not treated by Śākya mchog ldan just as a difficult and unpleasant problem to deal with but as the very key allowing us to understand how different parts of the Mahāyāna fit together. Second, this chapter shows how Śākya

mchog ldan's interpretation of the Five Treatises encapsulates in a nutshell his general interpretation of the whole of Mahāyāna, including the Vajrayāna. Third, this chapter shows how the hermeneutical point made by Śākya mchog ldan in chapter 3 is at the center of his general interpretation of the Five Treatises, and that he himself uses it as a way of contrasting Tibetan interpretations at both doxographic and historical levels. As a result, we can conclude that for him, an analysis of hermeneutical concerns applies not only to the interpretation of the Five Treatises, but to the Mahāyāna as a whole. We can then use that aspect of his thought as a point of comparison with other systems, whose decision of following another hermeneutical model can explain many aspects of *niḥsvabhāvavāda* Madhyamaka in general.

Chapter 1
The Place and Importance of the Five Treatises of Maitreya in Tibetan Buddhist Doctrine

The present chapter explains how, of all the fields of Tibetan literature, *Prajñāpāramitā* literature and, especially, Madhyamaka philosophy became the most important for the doctrinal identity of different schools. It then describes the two main tendencies found in Mahāyāna doctrine, and how, in the Tibetan context, their presence creates doctrinal tension and the need to resolve it. Finally, it explains how the Five Treatises of Maitreya came to constitute the main textual locus for that tension, and thus the subject of the most revealing aspects of Tibetan attempts at resolving it.

1. Tibetan fields of knowledge

The Tibetan literary tradition organizes the major fields of knowledge as following the categories of the *bstan 'gyur*, the body of Indian and early Tibetan commentaries on the Buddhist canon and other Indian authoritative treatises. As organized in its final form by Bu ston Rin chen grub in his catalogue of the *bsTan 'gyur*, they include hymns (*bstod tshogs*), Tantra (*rgyud*), Perfection of Wisdom (*sher phyin*), Madhyamaka (*dbu ma*), Sūtric commentary (*mdo 'grel*), Mind Only (*sems tsam pa*), Abhidharma (*mngon pa*), Vinaya (*'dul ba*), Jātaka commentaries (*skyes rabs*), epistles (*spring yig*), pramāṇa (*tshad ma*),

linguistics and grammar (*sgra mdo*), medicine (*gso rig pa*), crafts (*bzo ba*), and civility and societal norms (*lugs kyi bstan bcos*). Tibetan contributions to the body of knowledge in any of these fields, be they polemic, educative or theoretical, almost invariably take the form of a commentary on one or many of the famous treatises dealing with these subjects, or at least as a general summary of explanation of the topic itself. Thus the categories used to organize the scriptural collection of the *bstan `gyur* reflect the categories of knowledge in general, such as the ten fields of knowledge and five major and minor sciences, as delineated, for example, by Sa skya Paṇḍita.

The most substantial areas of doctrinal debate within the Tibetan tradition, though, concentrate around very few areas, namely, middle way philosophy (Madhyamaka, Tib. *dbu ma*), interpretations of the Perfection of Wisdom (*Prajñāpāramitā*) doctrines, and valid cognition (*pramāṇa*, *tshad ma*). This is of course not to say that Tibetans are in universal agreement on all the other topics, but that the three areas just mentioned constitute centers of long-lasting debates—sometimes over many generations— and are considered as necessary elements of a Tibetan Buddhist doctrinal system. Perfection of Wisdom and Madhyamaka are a special case, for they form in a way overlapping categories. The Tibetan tradition usually separates the subject of Prajñāpāramitā between its "hidden meaning" (*sbas don*), i.e., the stages of realization (*mngon rtogs kyi rim pa*) and its explicit presentation (*dngos bstan*), i.e., the stages of emptiness (*stong nyid kyi rim pa*). Since Tibetans treat Madhyamaka as the discussion of the second topic, the stages of emptiness, it is itself considered a subdivision of Prajñāpāramitā. At the same time, though, that subdivision became in time philosophically and doctrinally more

important than the main category, for substantial philosophical debates came to take place more about the interpretation of emptiness than on the stages of realization.

In the classical and post-classical periods[48], i.e., from the 12th to the 17th centuries, the interpretation of the view of the *Perfection of Wisdom* is almost universally acknowledged as falling under the umbrella of Madhyamaka philosophy, and most debates on these subjects become sub-issues of Madhyamaka. This can perhaps be explained by the fact that Tibetans consider Madhyamaka to be exegetically more direct than the Perfection of Wisdom—since Madhyamaka scriptures, starting with Nāgārjuna's own *Root Stanzas on the Middle Way (*MMK), are themselves considered to be commentaries on the *Perfection of Wisdom*, and since starting at the classical period almost unanimous agreement is given to the fact that Nāgārjuna's interpretation represents the final definitive meaning of the Perfection of Wisdom, interpretations of that subject mostly take place as discussions of Nāgārjuna's philosophy. To my knowledge, except for Śākya mchog ldan, who labeled Ālīkākāra-Yogācāra as a form of Madhyamaka, no Tibetan scholar in the classical and post-classical periods has claimed for himself the position of Yogācāra. This label has been attributed by authors to others, but even scholars who interpret the Perfection of Wisdom in a way that resembles Mind Only or Yogācāra—such as the Jo nang or *gzhan stong*, which uses an implicative negation and three-nature theory to explain emptiness—will rather brand their view as a sort of Madhyamaka, such as Great Madhyamaka (*dbu ma chen po*).

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[48] As defined by Ruegg in *Studies in Indian and Tibetan Madhyamaka Thought*, 3-8.

Discussions of valid cognition (*pramāṇa,* Tib., *tshad ma*), as philosophically rich as they can be, cannot be described as being as important, from the point of view of Buddhist doctrinal identity, as those dealing with Madhyamaka and Perfection of Wisdom. Although serious philosophers usually make some attempt at integrating issues of valid cognition within the fold of their general approach, no doctrinal system is defined by a particular understanding of *pramāṇa.* Rather, it is likely the case that a scholar's integration of *pramāṇa* within Madhyamaka becomes a measure of the success of the system in integrating the necessary parts of a doctrinal system, but very unlikely that any Buddhist interpretation of essential scriptures starts from *pramāṇa* as defining its approach to Buddhist doctrine in general.[49] In fact, *pramāṇa* in many ways appears as a para-doctrinal issue spanning all areas of Indian and Tibetan philosophy, more as a cognate or secondary issue of doctrine rather than as an elaboration on doctrine itself. Pramāṇa theories were often designed to prove a religious system's authenticity as valid knowledge, and were not given as specific doctrine of any religious or philosophical schools.

The definition of the place of *pramāṇa* elaborated by 'Ju Mi pham (1846-1912) provides us a good example of the real function of these discussions with regard to doctrinal

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[49] We could say, though, that one of the most debated issues of Tibetan Madhyamaka, that of the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction, is precisely one of *pramāṇa*, for according to many exegetes the only substantial difference between these two approaches consists in the way to establish emptiness, and the kind of object of knowledge it represents. Whether emptiness is conceptual or not, and whether it needs to be proven by an independent syllogism, are seen by most non dGe lugs interpreters as defining these two approaches. Nevertheless, this is more a case of *pramāṇa* and Madhyamaka being conflated than the first defining the latter.

systems in general.[50] Mi pham distinguished *pramāṇas* not only based on the classical Buddhist distinction between direct perception (*mngon sum*, *pratyakṣa*) and inference (*rjes dpag, anumāna*), but also between pure and impure and between ultimate and relative *pramāṇas*. This innovative interpretation integrates within the domain of theories of valid cognition the reality that these cognitions are supposed to fathom. Those cognitions thus become part of the system of description of reality, Madhyamaka (and, for Mi pham, tantra), as the description of the process by which one perceives and experiences it. Yet overall this theory still forms an appendix, so to speak, to Madhyamaka and tantra as descriptions of reality, and Mi pham's particular doctrinal system rests more on his interpretation of Madhyamaka and its relation to tantra than on his contribution to debates on epistemology.

Although tantra does form an essential part of Tibetan doctrinal systems, especially in the formulation of its relation to Madhyamaka philosophy, we cannot count this field of Buddhist studies as being the focus of crucial doctrinal and philosophical debates. First, the topic itself is not very well suited to philosophical arguments. We can even wonder whether it is appropriate to treat tantric discourse as being philosophical at all; since the function of tantric texts is primarily pragmatic, i.e., aimed at describing meditative exercises or visions of reality to be cultivated in meditation and not studied conceptually, they are not well suited for study as theoretical descriptions of reality. Second, tantra in itself is just not a topic that is debated very much— at least from the

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[50] See Lipman, "What is Buddhist Logic?"; Pettit, *Mipham's Beacon of certainty*, 107-111.Whereas Mi pham traces his interpretation back to theories developed by kLong chen rab 'byams, we do not at the moment have access to textual evidence proving his claim.

doctrinal perspective. There are of course many polemics regarding the authenticity of various traditions, the crucial exegetical relationship between tantra and sūtra (especially on the question of which one is exegetically more fundamental than the other, i.e., whether one should interpret tantra in the light of sūtra, and hence Madhyamaka, or vice versa), and the proper way of putting it into practice.[51] Nonetheless, the identity of tantric lineages depends primarily on lineages of transmission and tradition, not on doctrine, and tantra itself is not the place where the doctrines of different schools or systems significantly differ. As with pramāṇa, it is in its relationship to the main doctrinal field of debate, Madhyamaka, that it takes doctrinal importance.

2. The importance of Madhyamaka for doctrinal identity

The identity of the various schools of Tibetan Buddhism is most often explained in terms of tantric lineage and its historical transmission; hence it is a mistake to portray doctrinal positions, such as a particular interpretation of Madhyamaka, as defining a Tibetan Buddhist school or order. Nevertheless, we still find as a subset of a school's identity a portion of doctrinal identity, in which the lineage transmits a particular

[51] For example, Bu ston, in his edition of the bKa' 'gyur, rejected the authority of most rNying ma tantras because of questions regarding their authority, based principally on the unavailability of Sanskrit originals for those tantras. Tsong kha pa founded his tantric system on the principle that tantra could and must be interpreted on the basis of a sound understanding of Madhyamaka following a path of gradual training. Thus, the way the different orders define their identity is often based on different approaches to tantra, in particular with regard to other aspects of the path such as monastic discipline, intellectual training, prerequisites and preliminary practices, etc. On Tsong kha pa's Madhyamaka reading of vajrayāna, see Thupten Jinpa, *Self, Reality and Reason in Tibetan Philosophy: Tsongkhapa's Quest for the Middle Way*, annotated edition. (Routledge, 2002), 12, 140.

strategy of interpretation of scriptures that harmonizes them with the doctrine and practice of each lineage. For example, the rNying ma synthesis of Madhyamaka with rDzogs chen, found in the great scholars of that order throughout the centuries, point to a central concern and strategy orienting Madhyamaka interpretation in that school.

I propose here that, for Tibetan schools in general, Madhyamaka became the foremost topic of doctrinal identity. Several clues point to that conclusion: first, that system of Buddhist philosophy was identified very early in the Tibetan tradition (at the time of the establishment of education institutions and the translation of the Buddhist corpus into Tibetan, connected with the famous bSam yas debate[52]) as the final view of the Buddha on the nature of reality and as the supreme view of the Mahāyāna. There is no doubt that that preference for Madhyamaka was already present and popular in India prior to the conversion of Tibet, and Indian Buddhists who were instrumental in the establishment of Buddhist doctrine in Tibet—people like Śāntarakṣita, Kamalaśīla, Padmasambhava, etc.—seemed for the majority to agree on the fact that Nāgārjunian Madhyamaka philosophy represented the Buddha's final doctrinal intent.

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[52] The bSam yas debate is mentioned in several Tibetan sources, including the *sBa bzhed zhabs btags ma*, the *Chos `byung me tog snying po* of Nyang Nyi ma 'od zer, Bu ston's *bde bar gshegs pa'i bstan pa'i gsal byed chos kyi 'byung gnas gsung rab rin po che'i mdzod*, dPa bo gtsug lag phreng ba's *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, Padma dkar po's *Chos 'byung bstan pa'i padma rgyas pa'i nyin byed*, and dKon mchog lhun grub's *Dam pa'i chos kyi byung tshul legs par bshad pa bstan rgya mtshor 'jug pa'i gru chen*. Cf. Ruegg, *Studies in Indian and Tibetan Madhyamaka Thought*, 2-3; Ruegg, *Buddha-Nature, Mind, and the Problem of Gradualism in a Comparative Perspective*; Demiéville, *Le Concile De Lhasa*; Wangdu and Dimberger, *dBa' Bzhed*. The royal edict issued as the result of the debate, as the topic of the debate itself, is essentially soteriological: it vindicates the "path of the six perfections" and the "view of Nāgārjuna". Yet it also proclaims the "Madhyamaka view of Nāgārjuna" as Tibet's official doctrine. While Ruegg and Demiéville look in detail at whether the debate really happened or not, etc., it holds enough symbolic importance for Tibetan thinkers that that question is irrelevant to the present study.

Second, in general, Tibetan interpreters take very seriously the traditional principle that the Buddha's thought, which is itself complete and perfect, was perfectly explained by great Indian exegetes. Those explanations and exegeses of the Buddhist doctrine form the ground from which a Tibetan exponent may expand, but not something which Tibetans may directly challenge or question. In other words, Tibetan interpretations are assumed to necessarily take one of the routes of interpretation traced by some great Indian exegete. From the point of view of exegesis, Tibetans follow that principle by applying the distinction that is made between *bka'* and *bstan bcos* (Skt., *vacana* or *buddhavacana* and *śāstra,* i.e., between direct words of the Buddha and explanations of these same words), where the latter, which for doctrinal issues is considered to be an elaboration on the first, is exegetically more explicit, and hence cannot be by-passed by later interpreters without some good reason. Thus, if the *Perfection of Wisdom* teachings have already been explained in detail by great Indian interpreters, it is more likely that *their* explanations be the subject of later debates, lest Tibetan interpreters enter into the uncomfortable and inappropriate situation of debating directly with Indian authors of great authority. Rather, Tibetan interpreters consistently approach those debates by pitting Indian commentators against each other, identifying their own position as following that of some major Indian figure. Madhyamaka, which is understood by tradition as being a primary distillation of the *Perfection of Wisdom* teachings, thus becomes the preferred topic for debate, for it already provides a clear and explicit statement of what the Mahāyāna teachings convey.

The preference for Madhyamaka as the way to approach the topic of the *Perfection of Wisdom* was not constant through Tibetan history. As we mentioned earlier, there

seems to have been some shift around the classical period, when schools identified their doctrinal stance on the basis of Madhyamaka rather than on their interpretation of *Perfection of Wisdom*, or at least considered treatises explaining the first topic to be more important in some way.[53] The tradition of explanation and commentary of the Perfection of Wisdom, and especially of the *Abhisamayālaṇkāra,* was strong also in India prior to the 9th Century. Yet, even in India, the focus on Madhyamaka, perhaps as the way in which commentators could most distinctly distinguish their approach vis-à-vis other schools, is obvious starting in the 7th century, when the major works of famous authors are remembered as commentaries on Madhyamaka and Yogācāra before their contribution on *Prajñāpāramitā* texts.[54] Regardless of the varying degrees to which these two exegetical traditions were definitive of doctrinal issues, in general Madhyamaka and *Perfection of Wisdom* thus constitute the two main streams of scriptural sources determining doctrinal systems and traditions.

3. Scriptural sources for Perfection of Wisdom and Madhyamaka

Since all those debates essentially consist in discussions of different interpretations of the Perfection of Wisdom teachings—the essence of Mahāyāna ontology and its relation to soteriology—and since Tibetan continuations of these debates all amount to

[53] That can be seen in purely quantitative terms for example in the recension of works published in the *bKa' gdams gsung 'bum*, a collection of texts from the 11th-14th centuries, where commentaries on the *Prajñāpāramitā* and, incidentally, on the Five Treatises of Maitreya, occupy a predominant place.

[54] At least insofar as doctrinal schools are concerned, Tibetans focus on the major Madhyamaka commentaries of Buddhapālita, Bhavya, Candrakīrti and Śantarakṣita, and on the Yogācāra works of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu as defining doctrinal schools. Prajñāpāramitā commentaries such as Haribhadra's are used by schools of different doctrinal orientations.

commentary on commentaries on the Perfection of Wisdom, it is important not to forget their scriptural basis.[55] The identification of the scriptures that are here discussed, as well as the different layers of interpretation which lead to Tibetan discussions of Madhyamaka and *Perfection of Wisdom*, provide us with the map of all the possible interpretations that were available to the Tibetan exegete, and how they relate to each other.

Giving an outline of the scriptural sources for Madhyamaka and *Perfection of Wisdom* is not that simple, though, for the simple reason that there is no common agreement on what can count as a Madhyamaka or Perfection of Wisdom source. For Tibetan Madhyamaka, we can distinguish between two main approaches. The first approach limits what we could define as the explicit Madhyamaka scriptural corpus to the "Collection of Reasoning" (*rigs tshogs*) of Nāgārjuna—the six treatises that follow, according to the Tibetan tradition, a rational-argumentative approach to emptiness—and to the Indian commentaries on those texts, including those of Buddhapālita, Bhavya, Candrakīrti, Śantideva, Jñānagarbha, Śantarakṣita and Kamalaśīla. Since the writings of Nāgārjuna are themselves liable to be interpreted in many different ways, in general it seems that Tibetan interpreters compose their most doctrinally distinctive works as commentaries on second-order Madhyamaka commentaries, such as the *Madhyamakāvatāra* of Candrakīrti, Śantideva's *Bodhisattvacāryavatāra* or Śantarakṣita's *Madhyamakālaṅkāra*. Commentaries on the *Mūlamadhyamakakārika*, for example, often appear as exercises in a Madhyamaka method developed in relation with some later

[55] On the scriptural corpus of PP, see Conze, *The Prajñāpāramitā literature*.

scripture; Tsong kha pa's commentary, for example, applies his exegesis of Candrakīrti.[56]

The second Tibetan approach takes a more inclusive stance, and goes so far as to include other writings of Nāgārjuna, in particular those classified as belonging to the *Collection of Hymns* (*bstod tshogs*), such as the *Dharmadhātustotra,* as being *explicit*[57] statements of the definitive meaning of Madhyamaka. Including these scriptures as belonging to the family of Madhyamaka of course entails redefining the category to include teachings that do not follow the approach of the *rigs tshogs*. In addition to Nāgārjuna's *bstod tshogs* texts, this second approach, often labeled "Great Madhyamaka", recognizes some texts otherwise associated with Yogācāra philosophy, such as the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, *Mahāyānasaṃgraha*, and the Yogācāra writing of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu in general, as also representing the Madhyamaka.[58] This Great Madhyamaka or *gzhan stong* (other emptiness) definition of Madhyamaka scriptures, defended notably by Dol po pa shes rab rgyal mtshan, Śākya mchog ldan, the seventh Karmapa Chos grags gya mtsho, Jo nang Tārānātha and, later, 'Jam mgon Kong sprul and mKhyen brtse dbang po, puts into question the traditional association of Madhyamaka exclusively with scriptures of the Middle Turning, arguing that Madhyamaka also includes teachings belonging to the Final Turning.

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[56] For example, in his commentary on MMK I, 1, Tsong kha pa quotes from both the *Prasannapadā* and the *Madhyamakāvatāra* (*rTsa shes ṭīk chen*, p. 38; translation in Tsoṅ-kha-pa, *Ocean of Reasoning*, 48.

[57] Some authors accept that texts of that category are about Madhyamaka, but only implicitly.

[58] A similar widening of the scriptural basis for Madhyamaka also happens at the level of *Buddhavacana*; hence sūtras dealing with the Tathagatagarbha and, in general, the Third Turning of the Wheel, become included as sources for Madhyamaka.

As for the *Perfection of Wisdom* scriptures, Tibetan exegetes as a rule focus, not on the *bKa' 'gyur*, but on the simplified presentation found in the *Abhisamayālaṇkāra*. Although that text is theoretically considered to be a *śāstra*, a commentarial treatise, the difficulty one finds in approaching it and its status as almost-*vacana* (it is considered the direct pith instruction on the Prajñāpāramitā by the future Buddha Maitreya) lead Tibetan exegetes to approach it by relying on Indian commentaries. Of those, the most popular is probably Haribhadra's *Sphuṭārtha*; whether that commentary is authoritative, though, as in the case of Madhyamaka, becomes a debated issue, for some interpreters choose to privilege the commentaries on that text stemming directly from Asaṅga, Vasubandhu, and Dignāga, masters who in the Tibetan traditional accounts are directly connected with the lineage of Maitreya.

As in the case of Madhyamaka, a major point of contention rests on the interpretation one gives of the commentaries on the *Abhisamayālaṇkāra* that stem from Asaṅga's tradition. On one hand, since Tibetans very early on labeled that approach as representing the Yogācāra/Mind Only approach, which according to many people does not represent the final intent of the Mahāyāna, many see it as not advisable to interpret the *Perfection of Wisdom* in that light. On the other hand, though, the doxographic distinctions on which that assumption rests have been consistently challenged through Tibetan history, and the status of the *Perfection of Wisdom* is also extended beyond the meaning it is given in the *Sphūṭārtha*, and can include that of teachings given in the other four of the Five Treatises.

Thus, when looking at the body of Madhyamaka and *Perfection of Wisdom* scriptures dealing with the direct presentation of reality as emptiness (i.e., its direct presentation

or *dngos bstan)*, we find that, aside from the Collection of reasoning and Haribhadra's commentary on the *Abhisamayālaṇkāra,* the second main *śāstra* sources for these doctrinally determining topics belong to the collection which is arguably the second most important collection of *śāstras* for Tibetans: the texts associated with Maitreya and Asaṅga. Apart from Nāgārjuna's *Collection of Hymns*, it is really Maitreya's (and Asaṅga's) texts that constitute an alternative source for Mahāyāna doctrine.

One of the main scriptural sources for the interpretation of the *Perfection of Wisdom*, the AA, is interpreted by a majority of Tibetan interpreters in line with Madhyamaka philosophy. At the same time, it is part of the collection of the Five Treatises of Maitreya, which apart from AA are more closely related to a Yogācāra perspective on the same *Perfection of Wisdom*. This cohabitation of the AA with the rest of the Five Treatises thus creates the need to explain the relation between the AA and the other texts that belong to the Five Treatises.

The tradition also developed in an interesting way when Tibetan interpreters, in addition to granting great importance to the AA as a textbook on *Perfection of Wisdom*, adopted an interpretive scheme of another of the Five Treatises, the *Ratnagotravibhāga/Uttaratantra*, as a major source for Madhyamaka philosophy.[59] The importance of *Ratnagotravibhāga,* whose main topic is the buddha nature (*tathāgatagarbha)*, rests on elements which are only indirectly related to Madhyamaka

[59] On the origin of the RGV as a source for Madhyamaka, see Ruegg, *La Théorie Du Tathāgatagarbha Et Du Gotra; Études Sur La Sotériologie Et La Gnoséologie Du Bouddhisme*, 293-295; Ruegg, *Studies in Indian and Tibetan Madhyamaka Thought*, 72ff; Kano, "rNgog Blo-ldan-shes-rab's Summary of the Ratnagotravibhāga: The First Tibetan Commentary on a Crucial Source for the Buddha-nature Doctrine"; Mathes, *A direct path to the Buddha within*, 25-32; Jinpa (Intro.), *bde gshegs snying po rigs kyi chos skor*, xxv-xxxiii.

doctrine of emptiness, for they pertain to soteriology rather than Madhyamaka ontology. This illustrates a fact that applies to the Five Treatises and treatises from Asaṅga's tradition in general, namely that insofar as they provide a great deal of non-ontological doctrinal content for Mahāyāna doctrine in general, such as the *gotra* and buddha nature theories, stages of the path or *bhūmi* literature, and theories of Mahāyāna practice in general, they are still, even when their ontological stance is interpreted to be at odds with the Buddha's final intent for the Mahāyāna, recognized as determining doctrines and given a high degree of doctrinal importance.

4. The Tension Between Two Currents

The way interpretive traditions define what scriptures constitute sources for Madhyamaka and Perfection of Wisdom follows an ancient and fundamental set of two different attitudes or tendencies found in Mahāyāna in general. Since the present thesis presents the views of authors who believe that these two approaches should not be understood as rival "schools" or approaches to be found within the Mahāyāna, but as complementary parts of that path, I do not wish to use any label such as "school", "order" or movement to refer to those trends; rather I would prefer, for the time being, to refer to them as tendencies, currents or approaches. Whether one chooses to see them as incompatible is arguably not dependent solely on the content and attitude of the trends, but rather on how one chooses to solve certain tensions that their difference may create. I also will not here enter into a discussion of how these tendencies may reflect historical development within Mahāyāna Buddhism. That is of course a crucial and most interesting issue, but since at the moment we are looking

merely at Tibetan attempts to reconstruct the history and tradition of Mahāyāna, and since those Tibetan attempts do not give great value to understanding of historical currents—at least insofar as the latter aims at explaining the development of new ideas or trends—I will have for the moment to leave those issues for further research.[60]

The two major trends or tendencies one finds in Mahāyāna can be delineated on many—probably on all—levels of religious doctrine. They have already been identified by several scholars using different labels. La Vallée Poussin referred to "rationalist" and "mystic", Schmithausen as "positive-mystical" and "negative-intellectualist", and Ruegg applied the terms "apophatic" and "cataphatic" to Madhyamaka philosophy—all referring to the same two currents.[61]

From the point of view of doxography, both modern scholarship and Tibetan doxographic literature refers to these tendencies as Madhyamaka (*dbu ma*) and Yogācāra (*rnal 'byor spyod pa*)/Cittamātra (*sems tsam pa*). More precisely, we could refer to the first trends as Madhyamaka of essencelessness (*niḥsvabhāvavāda).* To what extent Yogācāra authors viewed themselves as members of a distinct school is not clear, but for Tibetans at least it is clear that these form distinct approaches, the first focusing on emptiness, the second focusing on the unreality of the external world and on non-dual gnosis as the goal of religious practice. Indian and Tibetan sources for the most part

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[60] Cf. Davidson, *Systems of Transformation*, ch. 5, Harris, *The Continuity of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra in Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism*; Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism*; Schopen, *Figments and Fragments of Mahayana Buddhism in India*.,

[61] Louis de La Vallée Poussin, Musīla et Nārada. *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* 6 (1936-37) 189-222; Schmithausen, "On some aspects of descriptions or theories of 'liberating insight' and 'enlightenement' in Early Buddhism." See also Tucci, *On some aspects of the doctrines of Maitreya (Nātha) and Asaṅga, being a course of five lectures delivered at the University of Calcutta*, chap. 1-2.

use the labels Yogācāra and Cittamātra interchangeably; yet since one of the contentions of one of the main sources for the present study, Śākya mchog ldan, is that these two labels refer to distinct systems, and moreover that Yogācāra is distinct precisely insofar as it does not hold that the mind is ultimately real, I prefer for now to use the label Yogācāra to refer to that trend.

These two approaches are reflected in the preferred language used to refer to the ultimate. While Madhyamaka focuses on emptiness or, for some, absence of elaborations, Yogācāra-oriented doctrines focus on more positive notions like buddha nature, *dharmadhātu*, or gnosis (*ye shes*). That last concept, emphasized in Yogācāra, is present in Madhyamaka, but with less importance than *prajñā*, discriminating awareness that perceives the lack of true existence of phenomena.

The basic ontological formulation of the philosophical views associated with, broadly speaking,[62] Madhyamaka and Yogācāra, are expressed in different ways: whereas Madhyamaka emphasizes primarily the binary model of the two truths or realities (*satyadvaya*) , Yogācāra focuses principally on the three-nature model. It is not my claim here that the three-nature model is a parallel or replica of the theory of the two truths; yet we can say that it plays the same function within the system, i.e., providing a model that allows for different levels of reality and experience to coexist without contradiction, allowing at the same time for the process of liberation from *saṃsāra* to be explained.

[62] The "negative" approach of Madhyamaka is also associated with more or less positive notions such as "absence of conceptual elaborations" (*spros pa thams cad dang bral ba*), which can sometimes be understood as a positive state of mind; the positive can also be associated with negative concepts like freedom from adventitious defilements (*glo bur ba'i zag pa dang bral ba).*

In terms of scriptural traditions, Madhyamaka is associated with scriptures described as belonging to the middle turning of the wheel of dharma, while Yogācāra focuses primarily on the final turning. As we mentioned earlier, the śāstras associated with Madhyamaka stem from Nāgārjuna's tradition, those with Yogācāra from Maitreya-Asaṅga and their followers, including Vasubandhu, Dignāga, Sthiramati, and eventually Ratnākaraśanti. The Tibetan tradition takes the association further by making the distinctions between two aspects found in the middle final turnings, namely the profound (*zab mo*) and vast (*rgya che ba*) aspects of the Mahāyāna teachings, which correspond respectively to explicit and implicit statements of that view.

There are also very distinct mythologies for the two trends: in the traditional classification of the greatest Indian commentators on Buddhism, which glorifies the two supreme ones, Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga, and the six "ornaments" of India, we count members associated with both approaches, but the two founding fathers of those systems hold a special place. The mythology of Madhyamaka (and *Perfection of Wisdom*) attributes the discovery of *Perfection of Wisdom* to Nāgārjuna during a voyage in the realm of the *nāga* creatures; the Yogācāra scriptures were also revealed, but from the heavenly realm of Tuṣita, where the bodhisattva Maitreya is awaiting the time for his appearance as the next fully enlightened buddha of the fortunate eon.

Finally, the study of Tibetan Yogācāra deals with a particular phenomenon, for that trend of Mahāyāna holds a very ambiguous place in Tibetan doctrinal traditions, a mixture of respect and appreciation and fundamental disagreement. The representations of that system as claiming the real existence of mind or consciousness, being so clearly at odds with the Madhyamaka view which is the most widespread in

Tibet, colors the appreciation that many authors show for Yogācāra with an *a priori* reservation. Moreover, since there are not[63] many self-proclaimed Yogācārins in Tibet, that tradition mostly describes and explains Yogācāra from an outsider's perspective, as a "lower" system of tenets. At the same time, though, Yogācāra elements always keep pervading Tibetan doctrinal systems, either through integration within Madhyamaka, or through reinterpretation or changes in vocabulary. It is the purpose of the present thesis to help clarify the relationship between these two trends found in the Tibetan Mahāyāna tradition.

More than just varying trends, these two approaches can often be seen to be in direct conflict. Many of the aspects we mentioned above are very difficult to reconcile. Especially for the elements which define Madhyamaka, such as the theory of emptiness as a simple negation, and the use of the two-truths theory to describe reality, the Yogācāra doctrines of eternal and pure buddha nature, of the perfected nature (*parinịspanna-lakṣana*), and ineffable non-dual gnosis, it looks almost impossible to philosophically reconcile the two systems.

5. The Importance of a Resolution

That conflict and the need for a strategy of resolution seems to have been recognized quite early in the Indian tradition, for it is the very topic of some Mahāyāna scriptures, most importantly of the *Saṃdhinirmocana* (SNS), which has apparently been composed

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[63] Śākya mchog ldan, insofar as he claims the unity of Alīkākāra-Yogācāra and Madhyamaka, could be the only example of self-proclaimed Yogācārin. Cf. Komarovski, *Echoes of Empty Luminosity: Reevaluation and Unique Interpretation of Yogācāra and Niḥsvabhāvavāda Madhyamaka by the Fifteenth Century Tibetan Thinker Śākya mchog ldan*, 211-228.

sometime in the fourth century[64], i.e., at the peak of the period where Yogācāra was developed in India, some time before or during the life of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu. The SNS, which is hermeneutical in nature, uses scriptural currents and hermeneutic categories such as the three turnings and definitive and provisional meanings to make a synthesis of the two systems where Yogācāra elements are portrayed as more explicit in intent than the Madhyamaka elements. The teachings on emptiness as a simple negation are portrayed as being authentic yet provisional in meaning, while the teachings on the three-nature theory are described by the Buddha as being fully explicit and definitive.[65] Tibetan authors recognized that text as stating explicitely the Yogācāra hermeneutics of Mahāyāna scriptures; for example, Tsong kha pa structured the Yogācāra section of his *Drang nges legs bshad snying po* based on the structure of the SNS.[66]

Since most Tibetans, due to their preference for Madhyamaka, obviously do not accept the solution provided by the *Saṃdhinirmocana*, it becomes a recurrent responsibility and challenge for Tibetan Mādhyamikas to develop their own interpretive strategy in the resolution of that tension. I would argue, moreover, that the particular Tibetan situation makes resolving that tension an even more difficult task, because (1) The place of Vajrayāna in the Tibetan traditions makes a resolution of the tension between positive and negative approaches to the ultimate even more necessary; (2) the place of

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[64] Discussions of the *Saṃdhinirmocana*'s dates are summed up in Powers, *Hermeneutics and Tradition in the Saṃdhinirmocana-Sūtra*, 4.
[65] On the *Saṃdhinirmocana* in the Tibetan tradition, see Powers, *Hermeneutics and Tradition in the Saṃdhinirmocana-Sūtra*; Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping*, 190-191.
[66] Tsoṅ-kha-pa, *Tsong Khapa's Speech of Gold in the Essence of True Eloquence*, 131-2; Tsoṅ-kha-pa, *The Central Philosophy of Tibet*; Hopkins, *Reflections on Reality*; Hopkins and Tsong-kha-pa, *Emptiness in the Mind-Only School of Buddhism Dynamic Responses to Dzong-Ka-Bā's The Essence of Eloquence*, 54-55..

buddha nature and of its most popular scriptural vessel, the RGV, in Tibetan doctrinal traditions requires a model of synthesis of that positive doctrine with the overall negative approach of *niḥsvabhāvavāda* Madhyamaka; (3) the importance of the AA for the Tibetan tradition of studying the *Prajñāpāramitā*, and the Tibetan recognition of that text as belonging to the Five Treatises, demands some kind of explanation of the relation of that text with the rest of the collection; (4) the Yogācāra corpus is the source for much doctrinal content—especially of a soteriological nature—that is necessary for the coherence of Tibetan systems, which are usually organized as gradual paths towards enlightenment; (5) the Tibetan system as a whole shows a general preference for inclusion of scriptural traditions and authorities as significant factors in their system of interpretation.

First, Tibetan Mahāyāna, in all its forms, is in a special position due to the fact that it accepts a synthesis of Madhyamaka and Vajrayāna as the ultimate form of Buddhism. There is no particular tension, in most Tibetans' eyes, between Mahāyāna in general and Vajrayāna—all systems of Buddhist vehicles, for example, arrange the different vehicles and stages of the path on a continuum—but, since Vajrayāna is recognized as superior or more advanced from the point of view of practice, it is uncomfortable or at least *a priori* inconsistent to hold that, while the Madhyamaka view is the highest and definitive view of Mahāyāna, some of the Vajrayāna's doctrines or practices may be at odds with it.[67] Now if we compare Vajrayāna with the two trends of Mahāyāna we

[67] Tsong kha pa is perhaps the only Tibetan exegete to interpret the Vajrayāna based on his definition of the object of negation of Madhyamaka, and to retain the notion of a simple negation even at the level of Vajrayāna experience. Cf. above, n. 6.

identified above, there is no doubt that it leans more towards the Yogācāra/final turning/cataphatic side of Mahāyāna than towards the Madhyamaka/middle turning/apophatic approach. Vajrayāna, in its different forms, privileges expressions of the ultimate related with the practitioner's direct experience, using very positive and affirming language such as that of primordial purity (*ka dag*), gnosis (*ye shes*), great bliss (*bde ba chen po*), or binary terms such as emptiness-clarity (*stong gsal*), bliss-emptiness (*bde stong*), and the like. It is also an undeniable feature of the Mahāmūdra and rDzogs chen systems to refer to the ultimate using positive terms such as awareness (*rig pa*) or *dharmakāya/dharmadhātu* (Tib., *chos sku/chos dbyings*). Whether these expressions are equivalent to the meaning of emptiness is of course a matter of debate, and many Tibetan authors have defended the claim that it is the case. Yet at face value the basic linguistic orientation of the Vajrayāna is towards positive expression, and is closer to the tendency of the final turning, Yogācāra's focus on mind, the subjective aspect of the ultimate, affirming language—such as the affirmation made by an implicative negation—, the cataphatic type of expression, and of course the preference for non dual gnosis as the wisdom of enlightenment.

It thus becomes a problem for Mādhyamikas, who believe in a strict negation as the final intent of the Buddha's teaching, to accommodate for the superiority of the Vajrayāna. The Mādhyamika solution to the tension between the two trends is commonly to classify the Yogācāra-inspired teaching as being provisional in intent; now if Vajrayāna follows the same approach, yet is considered practically to reflect more directly the Mahāyāna's intent, one ends up with the uncomfortable situation where the most explicit and direct teaching represents an approach which is only

provisional in meaning, and ultimately have to be interpreted by means of less "advanced" teachings. This difficulty is something Tibetan philosophers have had to deal with sooner or later, especially those who cling to the exclusive supremacy of Madhyamaka teachings.

Second, Tibetan Buddhist doctrinal traditions all face a particular tension due to their ambivalent relation to the doctrine of buddha nature which, if it did make its way into all Madhyamaka traditions of Tibet, undoubtedly developed from within or at least in relation to the Yogācāra trend of Mahāyāna. Simply put, the problem with that doctrine is that, while it is ontologically problematic, it is almost unavoidable from the point of view of soteriology and the explanation of the Buddhist path. The very nature of Tibetan Madhyamaka, which rests on dependent arising and causality, requires a cause for buddhahood. The description of that cause, as found in the Mahāyāna scriptures, as the *gotra* (or category of spiritual potential) of enlightenment, immediately becomes problematic when it is ascribed qualities that are similar to the result, such as purity, absence of change, etc.[68] This issue is a long lasting problem for Madhyamaka[69]. Now buddha nature theory not only comes from the Yogācāra trend of Mahāyāna, it finds its most definitive and explicit expression in the *Ratnagotravibhāga,* which belongs to the important yet problematic family of the Five Treatises. Hence Tibetans must come with some kind of theory to explain (away?) some of the problematic Yogācāra ideas that are embedded in the doctrine of Buddha nature,

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[68] E.g. at RGV, 1, 82, and particularly 2.29, "Acintyam nityaṃ ca dhruvam atha śivam śāsvatam atha / praśāntaṃ ca vyāpi vyapagatavikalpaṃ gaganavat /" ("[buddha nature is] Inconceivable, permanent, blissful, stable, peaceful, devoid of discriminating conceptions like space.")
[69] Cf. for example Ruegg, *La Théorie Du Tathāgatagarbha Et Du Gotra; Études Sur La Sotériologie Et La Gnoséologie Du Bouddhisme*, 313-318.

leading eventually to a full theory of how to deal with the general message of the Five Treatises.

Third, strictly from the point of view of scriptural sources, the determining importance of the *Abhisamayālaṇkāra* can create issues for Tibetan Mādhyamikas. By the time of the classical period, that text has become the one most important textbook on *Perfection of Wisdom* used by Tibetans for education and interpretation purposes.[70] The few following exegetical problems thus arise: first, the *Abhisamayālaṇkāra* contains a few instances of Yogācāra language, for example in passages like, "in the imperfect and completely perfect..."[71], suggesting, at least according to some interpreters, a reference to the three-nature theory. In general, the *Abhisamayālaṇkāra,* like the rest of *Perfection of Wisdom* literature, is not explicit enough to be definitively labeled as representing only the Madhyamaka approach; its language is often mysterious or at least liable to varying interpretations. Since the *Abhisamayālaṇkāra*'s status is that of a *śāstra*, that is, a scripture that explains the ambiguities originally found in the *Perfection of Wisdom*, it is problematic that some of the ambiguity remains within it. There is also an at least supposed Indian precedent for the interpretation of the AA in Yogācāra fashion, namely the now unavailable commentaries attributed to Asaṅga, the *de nyid rnam nges,* and Vasubandhu, the *gzhung 'grel.*[72] In general, the fact that the origin of the text is the same as that of other major Yogācāra treatises, that is, from the Maitreya-Asaṅga

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[70] For example, in the standard dGe lugs pa curriculum that text is studied for six years. See Hopkins and Tsong-kha-pa, *Emptiness in the Mind-Only School of Buddhism Dynamic Responses to Dzong-Ka-Bā's The Essence of Eloquence*, 9; Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping*, 113.
[71] *Abhisamayālaṇkāra*, sde dge, vol. 80, 6b, "de ma rdzogs dang rab rdzogs dang"...
[72] Although Tibetans refer to those texts no one seems to have seen an actual copy; the authorship of those texts is debated and uncertain.

lineage, is itself somewhat prolematic. Whereas in India there are interpretations of the *Perfection of Wisdom* as well from the Yogācāra as from the Madhyamaka perspectives, from the point of view of Tibetan *niḥsvabhāvavāda*-Madhyamaka, the *Perfection of Wisdom* is understood to be explainable consistently only from the point of view of Madhyamaka. The problem is that the commentators who explained the *Prajñāpāramitā* in typical Yogācāra fashion, Asaṅga, Vasubandhu and their followers, were not some obscure later authors, but the very ones who were associated with the first dissemination (and probably creation) of the AA. Of course these concerns do not belong strictly speaking to the direct factors of interpretation of the text; in the Tibetan scholastic context, though, where ideas of transmission and lineage are taken into serious consideration, they have to be recognized and appreciated. Second, the *Abhisamayālaṇkāra*'s mere belonging to the set of the Five Treatises entails some problems. Although the Five Treatises of Maitreya are considered and interpreted independently, Tibetans (at least from the 14th century onwards, see chapter 2) still share the notion that they form a unity, sometimes even a single text[73]. Some of the Five Treatises, especially the *Sūtrālaṇkāra, Dharmadharmatāvibhaṇga, and Madhyāntavibhāga,* are almost unanimously recognized as representing the Yogācāra (or, according to some Tibetan interpreters, *gzhan stong* Madhyamaka) approach. That creates the exegetical problem of having to live with the idea that the Five Treatises are really one text, but one text that adopts different doctrinal points of view in its different parts. Tibetans have devised solutions to that exegetical problem; yet an

[73] One of the arguments used to establish the order of the Five Treatises is that the verse homage is stated in the AA and the verse of dedication in the RGV; thus the Five Treatises are presented as a single composition in five parts. See below, ch. 3 for a discussion of that issue.

interpretation which could account for a true unity of purpose shared by all the Five Treatises would be, from the point of view of the traditional understanding of the texts, more satisfying and comfortable. It dispenses one, for one thing, with the difficult task of having to explain why the Lord Maitreya decided to shift from the final perspective of the *Perfection of Wisdom* when he came to explain the stages of the path, the *gotra*, and so forth. This point of course applies not only to the *Abhisamayālaṇkāra,* but to the Five Treatises as a whole.

Fourth, the Yogācāra trend of Mahāyāna, especially as embodied in the scriptural tradition of Maitreya-Asaṅga, holds an important place in the Tibetan traditional imagination and scriptural system. As mentioned above, the mythology of the two supreme ones and six ornaments of India gives Asaṅga a status equivalent to the most influential and towering figure of the Indian commentarial tradition, Nāgārjuna. The bodhisattva Maitreya also is responsible, in the traditional accounts, for what is probably, from the point of view of sūtra-Mahāyāna, for the most important act of revelation after the Buddha's own career. It is therefore to be seen as a scriptural casualty to have to relegate all that prestige to the secondary category of teachings of provisional meaning. More importantly, though, and more tangible, is the fact that the Yogācāra teachings, and especially those of the Five Treatises, seem to have been given—or created, depending on one's perspective—for a specific and necessary purpose. The philosophy of Nāgārjuna and its interpretation of the *Perfection of Wisdom* is just not very explicit and informative on a lot of aspects of Mahāyāna doctrine. The material that is provided in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, the *Sūtrālaṇkāra*, and in the related Asaṅgian texts such as the *Yogācārabhūmi* and the *Mahāyānasaṃgraha* deals with issues

that are just not covered by Madhyamaka philosophy. The latter of course from the start makes a point of providing for the necessity of the Buddhist path; yet that does not constitute a full explanation of *how* that path functions. Moreover, if that explanation needs to contradict the basic Madhyamaka view, the project of reconciling the view of Madhyamaka with its application on the path cannot be fully successful. Hence the material provided in the Five Treatises and in general in Asaṅga's scriptural tradition remains unavoidable even when recognized as provisional in intent.

Fifth, more generally, we can say that in general it is considered a sign of success, in a tradition such as the one we find in Tibet, to be able to consistently integrate as many canonical doctrines as possible. To be forced to relegate them to a secondary status of provisionality is considered a casualty, for that contributes to diminishing the authority and prestige of some important founder of the tradition. The Buddhist scriptures are considered as complete and perfect; only with care can we interpret part of them as provisional, to the risk of being guilty of the serious fault of under-appreciating the scriptures.

For all these reasons, providing a complete explanation of how the teachings belonging to the Yogācāra trend of Buddhism, and in particular of how its definitive scriptural expression in the Five Treatises of Maitreya, becomes a central concern for Tibetan Mahāyāna philosophy, even when it chooses to consider the Madhyamaka trend as more definitive. Even when traditions reconcile the Five Treatises with their preference for Madhyamaka by interpreting the first as being, in part or whole, of provisional meaning, the doctrines contained in the texts still play a fundamental role in their doctrinal system.

Although to the present day scholarship has focused on the different versions of Madhyamaka philosophy found in Tibet, and on the particular interpretations of that view as defining the different schools or traditions, in many ways, we could claim that the place one gives the Five Treatises is more fundamental than many of the the particular, and sometimes not so fundamental, differences in the interpretation of Madhyamaka itself. Since the Five Treatises provide more content regarding the Buddhist path, since they represent a major scriptural source for the Mahāyāna, and in particular since their interpretation eventually defines how one reconciles one's interpretation of Madhyamaka both with Yogācāra elements and with the Vajrayāna, the strategy that is used to interpret them defines even more than the particular view of Madhyamaka a tradition's general synthesis of the Mahāyāna.

Chapter 2 : Tibetan Interpretations of the Five Treatises

Tibetans use the concept of the "Five Treatises of Maitreya" (*Byams chos sde lnga)* to refer to a group of texts that they attribute to Maitreya through Asaṅga, including the *Abhisamayālaṇkāra* (*mgon par rtogs pa'i rgyan, AA*), the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṇkāra* (*theg pa chen po'i mdo sde rgyan, MSA*), the *Madhyāntavibhāga (dbus dang mtha' rnam par 'byed pa, MV*), the *Dharmadharmatāvibhaṅga (chos dang chos nyid rnam par dbye ba, DDV*), and the *Ratnagotravibhāga (RGV),* which Tibetans most often refer to as the *Mahāyāna-Uttaratantra* (*theg pa chen po rgyud bla ma*). The Five Treatises can be divided between those that were present at the time of the first dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet (*snga dar*), and those that were discovered or brought later to Tibet. The first set comprises the *Abhisamayālaṇkāra*, the *Sūtrālaṇkāra*, and the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, while the texts that were later discovered and translated are the *Ratnagotravibhāga* and the *Dharmadharmatāvibhaṅga*. Although the Five Treatises cover a variety of topics and seem to defend several philosophical positions about these topics, the Tibetan tradition still takes very seriously the idea that they form a unit, and share to some extent a single intent.

First, the present chapter explains the concept of the Five Treatises and where it fits among Tibetan Buddhist scriptures. To attain that goal, we need to research its origin and identify precisely what Tibetan thinkers understand by it.

Second, I propose here a survey of interpretations of the Five Treatises as a unit. Each of the Five Treatises has been studied individually, but current scholarship shows a lack of interest for what authors say of the relationship between each of them and of the intent of the Five as a whole. This does disservice to the fact that the Tibetan tradition recognizes the Five Treatises as a single collection that on one hand does represent a diversity of views, but supposedly does share a single overarching intent.

Third, as a result of the survey of the views mentioned, I develop a typology of different approaches to the Five Treatises, identifying different positions based on their strategy in presenting an account of how their intent is to be interpreted in relation to the general identification of the definitive and the provisional, and the relation between those two parts of the corpus. I argue that differences of interpretation of the Five Treatises are exegetical more than hermeneutical: they do disagree on how to interpret specific texts, but not on the general procedure used to do so. Whatever philosophical and hermeneutical debates we can discern in these discussions are very limited.

Note on Method

The nature of section 2, a survey of Tibetan interpretations, requires a few remarks considering method. One chapter can of course not cover that issue over the whole of Tibetan literature. As a preliminary study of that concept, I propose here a survey of interpretations developed by influential Tibetan thinkers roughly from 1100-1500, that is, from rNgog Lotsāwa's translation of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* until the death of Śākya mchog ldan in 1507.

There can of course be no fully systematic method of identifying which authors will be chosen as informants, for their influence and importance can never be fully measured. I therefore limit myself to a survey of what Tibetan authors who have influenced their own tradition in general said of the Five Treatises, to authors who have made important contributions to their interpretation even though they may not have had the same degree of influence in general, and to authors who seem to have participated in a more or less direct form of debate with these informants. Such an identification of who was important or influential is of course either (at least in part) arbitrary or determined by our current understanding of the developments of the tradition of that period. Thus, the sampling of authors is biased by representations of their influence established later in the tradition and current nowadays. Even so, it is unrealistic, due to the sheer quantity of materials to be surveyed, to hope for a full account of all views. More detailed study of the thought of each of these authors will have to wait; yet it is my hope that the preliminary survey completed here may serve to orient further research. In particular, such a sample of the views expressed by otherwise influent thinkers on the Five Treatises allows for a preliminary typology of interpretations of the Five Treatises as a set—a useful step in understanding the way these texts were understood during that important period.

Although Tibetans generally all accept the concept of the Five Treatises, different authors grant it different levels of importance and credence. Hence, sometimes they choose *not* to treat it as an important subject. For example, an author like Sa skya Paṇḍita interprets four of them as being provisional, and does not make big efforts to provide a theory on their consistency. Some authors, due to their great contribution in

general, seem to stand out as important informants, yet do not make explicit comments about the category of the Five Treatises or about each of the texts. Hence sometimes we will have to limit the analysis of their views to statements made about individual treatises that are part of the Five or even to doctrines found therein, and try to reconstruct their position vis-à-vis the whole set.

That methodological weakness is softened by the fact that, overall, Tibetan debates around the Five Treatises consistently focus on several clearly defined issues. There is little debate, except with authors who defend a reading of all Five Treatises as definitive, about the message of the *Sūtrālaṇkāra*, the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, and the *Dharmadharmatāvibhaṅga*; others may disagree about their value and degree of authority, but they mostly agree that it represents the Yogācāra or Great Madhyamaka view. Since Tibetans in general, although not unanimously, shared the opinion that defending the three-nature theory, for example, clearly identified a text as belonging to Cittamātra, and since most thinkers, except those who accept *gzhan stong*, identify *niḥsvabhāvavāda* Madhyamaka as the most definitive tenet of Mahāyāna, differences between interpretations of various proponents of *niḥsvabhāvavāda* mostly rest on their interpretation of the two texts that do not openly teach the three-nature theory, the RGV and the AA, and thus on the issues of *tathāgatagarbha* and the Perfection of Wisdom in general.

Hence, when necessary, that is, for the few authors who do not explicitly state their interpretation of all the Five Treatises, we will have to limit our analysis of their view to their treatment of *tathāgatagarbha*, and sometimes of the *Abhisamayālaṇkāra*, and deduce from that what we can of their overall interpretation.

Historically and doctrinally, though, we cannot suppose that issues that arise in one of the Five Treatises were important for the others; for example, the doctrine of tathāgatagarbha is not present at all in the MAV, DDV and AA[74], and very little in the MSA.[75] Nonetheless choosing to interpret *tathāgatagarbha* based on the view found in the MAV or MSA rather than on a Madhyamaka reading, for example, generally tells us a lot about an author's stance on the Five Treatises.

1. Definition and History of the notion of the "Five Treatises"

Although the individual treatises that make up the "Five Treatises of Maitreya" are well known in most Mahāyāna traditions, that concept of the Five Treatises of Maitreya became well established only in Tibet[76]. In order to understand its significance, we must therefore first consider the context in which that concept arose; in other words, how did a set of more or less related texts become labeled as springing from the same supernatural author, and why were they identified as forming a set including a single intent and a high degree of cohesion? What relation did Tibetans posit between five texts and the concept of the Five Treatises? In order to establish that, I discuss here: 1) the history of the presence of each text in Tibet; 2) the origin and development of the concept of the Five Treatises.

[74] Although the AA does discuss the *gotra* theory, it does not talk about the *tathāgatagarbha*.
[75] Ruegg, *La Théorie Du Tathāgatagarbha Et Du Gotra; Études Sur La Sotériologie Et La Gnoséologie Du Bouddhisme*, 34.
[76] There is one Chinese instance of a concept of Five Treatises. See below, section 2.

1. History of the Five Treatises in Tibet

a) The Treatises translated during the early propagation (*snga dar*)

The Tibetan history of the Five Treatises, or at least of three of them, began at the time of the first dissemination of Buddhism in that country. The ldan kar ma catalogue signals entries for the *Abhisamayālaṇkāra* (Lalou no.516), together with the *rGya cher 'grel pa (vṛtti,* Lalou 517*)* of Ārya Vimuktisena and Haribhadra's *Spūṭhartha* (*sdud pa'i tshigs su bshad pa'i 'grel pa,* Lalou 518). The *bstan `gyur* (in all versions) includes the revised translation produced by 'go mi 'Chi med and bLo ldan shes rab. Hence, although there was an earlier translation associated with the collection held at the ldan kar temple, it has been abandoned, at least by the compilers of the *bstan `gyur,* and replaced by rNgog's translation. The *ldan kar ma* counts the *Abhisamayālaṇkāra* in the *Prajñāpāramitā* section.

The *Mahāyāna-Sūtrālaṇkāra*[77] (Lalou no. 632, T 4020) is recorded in the *bstan `gyur* as translated by dPal brtsegs and and Śākyasiṃha (it was later revised by bLo ldan shes rab, Sajjana and Parahita). Its *bshad pa* (Vasubandhu's *vyākhyā,* T 4029, Lalou 633*)* and *'grel bshad* (the *ṭīkā* of Ngo bo nyid med pa/Asvabhāva or Niḥsvabhāva, Lalou 634, T 4034) are all recorded as having been translated by the same dPal brtsegs and Śākyasiṃha. The Sūtrālaṇkāra-vṛtti-bhāṣya of Sthiramati (4034) was translated by Municandra and lCe bkra shis. If that is the same lCe bkra shis that translated the

[77] For a summary of the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṇkāra* corpus, see Paul Griffiths, "Painting Space with Colors", p. 41-48.

Guhyasamāja, that translation can be placed in the first dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet, even though it is not recorded in the ldan kar ma catalogue, which of course is but a partial list of the texts translated in the early period.

The *Madhyāntavibhāga-kārikā* (Lalou no. 635) with *'grel pa* (*Ṭīkā* of Vasubandhu 4027, Lalou 636) and *'grel bshad* (Tīkā of Sthiramati, 4032, 637) are also mentioned in the lDan kar ma. The *bstan `gyur* indicates that the three latter texts were translated by Ye shes sde, Śīlamitra and Jinendra bodhi. The same catalogue also interestingly classified the latter two texts into the *rnam par shes pa* (Vijñānavāda) section, showing that those two texts were probably brought to Tibet already labeled as expounding the views of Mind Only.

All three are mentioned as *śāstras* (Tib. *bstan bcos*) rather than as primary canonical scripture (*bka'*), and can be seen as the equivalent for Mind Only of what Nāgārjuna's commentaries are for Madhyamaka: interpretations of statements given in *sūtras*.[78] That status as explanations of sūtras is explicit in the title of the *Sūtrālaṇkāra*, half-explicit in the title of the *Abhisamayālaṇkāra*, whose full title, *Prajñāpāramita-upadeśa*, mentions the Perfection of Wisdom, and implicit in the title of the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, which is nevertheless explained by some commentators[79] as a commentary on the *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras.

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[78] On the myth of the revelation of the AA to Asaṅga, see also, Ruegg, *La Théorie Du Tathāgatagarbha Et Du Gotra; Études Sur La Sotériologie Et La Gnoséologie Du Bouddhisme*, 43., and Conze, *The Prajñāpāramitā literature*, 101.

[79] Shākya mchog ldan, for example, presents other-emptiness as one of two approaches to interpreting the Prajñāpāramitā, the other being *niḥsvabhāvavāda*.

Several other commentaries on the *Abhisamayālaṇkāra* are included in the *bstan 'gyur*; yet there is no mention of their existence in the lDan kar ma catalogue (or other catalogues of that period), and they are translated by authors of the *gsar ma* period.

The RGV and the *Dharmadharmatāvibhaṅga* are not mentioned in the ldan kar ma. That follows the Tibetan historical tradition of acknowledging those two texts as authentic compositions of Maitreya transmitted to Asaṅga, yet rediscovered at a later period following their loss.[80]

b) The Five Treatises at the time of the later propagation (*phyi dar*)

There is no known mention in Tibet of the RGV and DDV during the early propagation. The Tibetan tradition rather explicitly recognizes those two as having been rediscovered during the later propagation of dharma. Although the history of the discovery, introduction and transmission of those two texts is intimately connected, here they are treated separately.

The RGV/Uttaratantra

Good summaries of the history of the RGV in Tibet have already been produced by Ruegg and Kano Kazuo.[81] The *bstan 'gyur* includes the RGV/UT as translated by rNgog bLo ldan shes rab (1059-1109) and the Indian pandit Sajjana, who is renowned for transmitting those teachiings to rNgog. Although we can say that afterwards rNgog's translation, and even eventually to some degree his interpretation, became almost a

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[80] See Kano, "rNgog Blo-ldan-shes-rab's Summary of the Ratnagotravibhāga: The First Tibetan Commentary on a Crucial Source for the Buddha-nature Doctrine," 27-32.

[81] Ibid., 20ff. Ruegg, *La Théorie Du Tathāgatagarbha Et Du Gotra; Études Sur La Sotériologie Et La Gnoséologie Du Bouddhisme*, 36-37.

standard, it was not, at the time of the first introduction of that text, the only one circulating. The following six different translations of the RGV were produced in Tibet between the 11th and the 14th centuries :

(1) Atiśa (982–1054) and Nag-tsho Tshul-khrims-rgyal-ba (1011–1064)

(2) rNgog Blo-ldan-shes-rab (1059–1109) and Sajjana (late 11th cent.)

(3) sPa-tshab Nyi-ma-grags (b.1055)

(4) Mar-pa Do-pa Chos-kyi-dbang-phyug (1042–1136)

(5) Jo-nang Lo-tsā-ba Blo-gros-dpal (1299–1353 or 1300–1355)

(6) Yar-klungs Lo-tsā-ba Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan (1242–1346)[82]

The *Blue Annals* mention that bTsan Kha bo che also worked to diffuse the RGV in Tibet; yet as Kha bo che was not himself a translator we cannot suppose that that necessarily involved him producing a translation.[83] The appearance of these translations in Tibet is concomitant with the arising of the concept of the Five Treatises, a tradition which seems to stem from the Indian sources of the RGV, namely Maitrīpa and some of his successor holders of the teaching of the RGV, such as Sajjana, Ratnakāraśanti, Jñānaśrīmitra, Yamāri and their followers.

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[82] These are summarized in Kano, "rNgog Blo-ldan-shes-rab's Summary of the Ratnagotravibhāga: The First Tibetan Commentary on a Crucial Source for the Buddha-nature Doctrine," 90.
[83]'Gos Lo-tsā-ba Gźon-nu-dpal, *The blue annals*, 247-9; Kano, "rNgog Blo-ldan-shes-rab's Summary of the Ratnagotravibhāga: The First Tibetan Commentary on a Crucial Source for the Buddha-nature Doctrine," 90, n.4.

The Dharmadharmatāvibhaṅga

The account transmitted by Tibetans reports that the DDV was rediscovered at the same time as the RGV; yet the history of the introduction of that text in Tibet is not as clear as that of the RGV. What is obvious is that the DDV does not seem to have been as popular as the RGV when the latter text was introduced, or at least not the subject of as much debate, possibly because the interpretation of that text is not as controversial, since it clearly represents a Yogācāra approach.

The translation of the DDV in verse (*Chos dang chos nyid rnam par 'byed pa tshig le'ur byas pa)* included in the *bstan 'gyur* is the one completed by Mahajana and Zhwa ma Seng ge rgyal mtshan (T. 4023). The prose version (*Chos dang chos nyid rnam par 'byed pa,* T. 4022*)* is attributed to Śantibhadra and Tshul khrims rgyal ba, revised by Parahita and gZu dga ba'i rdo rje.

The *bstan 'gyur* lists the translation of the *Vṛtti (Chos dang chos nyid rnam par `byed pa'i 'grel pa*, T. 4028)*,* attributed to Vasubandhu, as being the work of Mahajana and rNgog bLo ldan shes rab.

There is surprisingly little information in the writings of Tibetan historians regarding the DDV, and it is probable that that text did not become very popular until a few centuries after its introduction in Tibet, when it was commented on by authors

sympathetic to the Yogācāra outlook such as the third Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje (1284-1339) and bCom ldan rig pa'i ral gri (1207-1355), the compiler of the bka' 'gyur[84].

Finally, although we do not have access to it, gZhon nu dpal mentions that Mar pa mdo pa had produced translations of all Five Treatises.[85]

2. History of the Concept of the Five Treatises

Apart from the history of each of the texts that comprise what Tibetans understand as the Five Treatises of Maitreya, it is even more crucial to our present purpose to get some understanding of the source of that notion. That question is not easily answered for several reasons. First, the traditional account is closely tied with the mythological account of Maitreya's revelation to Asaṅga, and it is hard to distinguish the history of the idea of Five Treatises from that myth, which is certainly more ancient. Second, as is often the case in Indian literature, the authorship and dates of all Five Treatises are still uncertain. Given those restrictions, we must limit our inquiry to the following specific questions: 1) When and where did the concept of "Five Treatises" first become an accepted notion? 2) What did the arising of that concept involve regarding the

[84] Rang byung rdo rje, *Chos dang chos nyid rnam par 'byed pa'i bstan bcos kyi rnam par bshad pa'i rgyan*, Collected Works vol. 3, 383-620; bCom ldan rig pa'i ral gri wrote both a summary (*bsdus don, Collected Works,* vol. 5, p. 663-668) and a detailed commentary (Vol. 5, p. 669-696) on the DDV.

[85] 'Gos Lo-tsā-ba Gźon-nu-dpal, *The blue annals*, 383-5. *Deb ther sngon po*, 464-6; Kano 104. Ruegg (*La Théorie Du Tathāgatagarbha Et Du Gotra; Études Sur La Sotériologie Et La Gnoséologie Du Bouddhisme*, 37.) seems to have confused that author with Mar pa of Lho brag, the famed translator and teacher of Mi la ras pa.

relationship of each of the Five Treatises to each other? 3) How did Tibetans come to understand that concept?

The traditional Tibetan accounts of the revelation of the Five Treatises, which all at the same time constitute historical claims about the origin of the idea of Five Treatises, have been related enough times that we do not here need to go through them in detail. Slightly varying but very similar accounts are given by Rong ston (1367-1449), 'Gos lo gZhon nu dpal (1392-1481), Jo nang kun dga' grol mchog (1507-1566), and Tārānātha (1575-1634).[86] In general Tibetans were concerned about the arising of the Five Treatises themselves, and did not entertain much the question of where that notion came from.

Modern scholarship on the question has spent a lot of effort on issues such as whether Maitreya was a human teacher or a celestial bodhisattva, whether he was the author of the Five Treatises and, to a lesser degree, what was the origin of the category.[87]

The fact that two of the Five Treatises were discovered or rediscovered as late as the 11th century led some scholars to believe that the whole tradition of the Five Treatises was a later Tibetan invention superimposed on a set of Indian texts also doubtfully attributed to Maitreya. Paul Griffiths writes: "The whole tradition of the five treatises (*chos lnga)* is very late. The Ldan kar catalogue does not know it, and there is no clear

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[86] They are already summed up in Kano, "rNgog Blo-ldan-shes-rab's Summary of the Ratnagotravibhāga: The First Tibetan Commentary on a Crucial Source for the Buddha-nature Doctrine," 27-31. Rong-ston, *Chos nyid rnam `byed 'grel pa, (11),*Tārānātha, *rGya gar chos 'byung,* 'Gos-lo, *rGyud Bla me long,* 4-11. Kun dga' grol mchog, *Khrid brgya'i skor,* 101-102. 'Gos lotsāwa also gives an account of the history of the Five Treatises in his commentary on the RGV-vyākhyā. See Mathes, *A direct path to the Buddha within*, 161-2.
[87] Ui, "On the Author of the Mahayana-sutralamkara"; Ruegg, *La Théorie Du Tathāgatagarbha Et Du Gotra; Études Sur La Sotériologie Et La Gnoséologie Du Bouddhisme*; Griffiths, "Painting Space with Colors: Tathāgatagarbha in the Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra-Corpus IX.22-37."

witness to it in Tibet until the twelfth or thirteenth century CE."[88] It can sometimes be an easy reflex to resolve difficulties by positing a traditional intervention; yet Griffiths' position is untenable. First, as we will see below, Tibetan sources mention the list of the Five Treatises as early as the 11th century. Second, Griffiths' claim that there is no Indian precedent to the belief in the authorship of Maitreya just does not match the facts. As Ruegg points out, Vasubandhu's commentary on MV, which dates back before the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet, does mention the story of the double authorship – that Maitreya had revealed the text to Asaṅga who later laid it down in writing. [89] The concept of the Five Treatises is clearly found in Indian sources originating from the 11th century, both in Sanskrit and Tibetan. In making his claim, Griffiths has chosen not to mention Ruegg's identification of at least one Indian source mentioning the Five Treatises, namely Jñānaśrīmitra's *Sākārasiddhiśāstra*:

> À partir du XIe siècle on trouve dans les sources sanskrites des références plus nombreuses au *RGV*, qui est parfois mentionné comme un des Cinq Enseignements de Maitreya. Ainsi Jñānaśrīmitra y renvoie souvent dans son *Sākārasiddhiśāstra;* et dans sa *Pañjika* du *Bodhisattvacāryavatāra* Prajñākaramati cite un vers du RGV.[90]

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[88] Griffiths, "Painting Space with Colors: Tathāgatagarbha in the Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra-Corpus IX.22-37," 43 n.7.

[89] *La Théorie Du Tathāgatagarbha Et Du Gotra; Études Sur La Sotériologie Et La Gnoséologie Du Bouddhisme*, 52, "Au reste, l'idée selon laquelle un des Enseignements de Maitreya a pour auteur un Bodhisattva est déjà attestée dans des ouvrages de Vasubandhu. Ainsi qu'on l'a déjà vu, la stance liminaire de son *Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣya* distingue clairement le 'créateur' ou auteur (*praṇetṛ* = rab tu mdzad pa) qui a énoncé le MAV de la personne qui l'a ensuite promulgué (*vaktṛ*, ou expliqué: 'chad pa)…"

[90] Ibid., 35.

Ruegg further characterized the tradition of the dual authorship of Maitreya and Asaṅga, moreover associated with a group of at least five texts, as being very widespread in both time and space,[91] and Ui showed that the MSA was probably already held as the work of Maitreya in 5th century India.[92]

There are also parallels to the tradition of the Five Treatises to be found in Chinese sources. First, Ui has showed that the authorship of Maitreya is not a late fabrication, but was present in China in the 6th century, suggesting that it was also current in India at that period. He writes:

> The followers of the Fa-hsiang-tsung, a school in China and Japan of the Vijñānavāda especially expounded by Dharmapāla (528-560 A.D.) in his *Vijñaptimātratā-siddhi-śāstra*, believe that Asaṅga was instructed in the *Yogācārya-bhūmi* and other treatises by Maitreya bodhisattva, the future Buddha, descending from the heaven *Tuṣita*, so that Asaṅga was the first human being who compiled or put down the Yogācārya-bhūmi etc. including the *Mahāyāna-Sūtrālaṇkāra*. This tradition was brought to China by Paramārtha (499-569) and Hiuan-tsang (599-664). We can not clearly trace when the tradition originated, but that even Dharmapāla believed the tradition is clear

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[91] Ruegg, *La Théorie Du Tathāgatagarbha Et Du Gotra; Études Sur La Sotériologie Et La Gnoséologie Du Bouddhisme*, 46, "Ainsi donc, selon des traditions très répandues dans le temps et dans l'espace, un groupe d'au moins Cinq Enseignements est associé avec le nom de Maitreya, Asaṅga n'ayant fait que les mettre par écrit sous l'inspiration de son maître céleste résidant au ciel Tuṣita."

[92] Ui, "On the Author of the Mahayana-sutralamkara." *Zeitschriften der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft," 219,* "His [Sthitamati] acquisition of the texts took place before 425, so that Sthitamati lived earlier than that date. At that time the *Sūtrālaṇkāra* was held in India to have been composed by Maitreya."

> from the fact that he is younger than Paramārtha and that his pupils Śīlabhadra, Jinaputra, etc. held the belief.[...] Thus, Indian Buddhists believed the tradition even at the time of I-tsing.[93]

In addition to this recognition of the authorship of Maitreya, there is an interesting Chinese precedent to the notion of the "Five Treatises of Maitreya". Shimaji mentioned a Chinese text composed by Tuen-luen, the *Yu k'ie louen,* a text belonging to the Tang dynasty (618-907) where the following five texts are referred to as the "Five Great Treatises of Maitreya":

> Yogācārya-bhūmi-śāstra (Maitreya-Asaṅga)
>
> MSA (Maitreya-Asaṅga)
>
> Fen pie yu-k'ie louen (Maitreya)
>
> MAV-śāstra (verse by Maitreya, prose by Vasubandhu)
>
> *Vajracchedikasūtraśāstra* (Maitreya, Nj. 1167, T.1510)

How can we explain that the Chinese tradition also recognized Five Treatises, even though the individual treatises are not the same as in the Tibetan list? This is a matter of speculation, yet we cannot rule out the possibility that the concept of the Five Treatises might have been common in China also, even though there was no trace in that country of the DDV and the AA, and that it may have been in some way shared with the Tibetan tradition. It would be a very novel find if the connection between the Chinese and the Tibetan traditions of the Five Treatises were established, for that

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[93] Ibid., 216-217.

would bring the date of the first mention of that tradition in the Indo-Tibetan tradition several centuries back.

As for Griffiths' claim that even in Tibet the tradition of the Five Treatises only arose in the twelfth or thirteenth century, it also overstresses the role of Tibetan sources in the creation of the notion of Five Treatises. In addition to the mention of the Five in 11th century Indian sources, there is an important statement to be found in the biography of Rwa Lo tsā ba that shows that the Five Treatises were well-known at least in mNga' ris at the end of the 11th century:

> at the "*Tho ling chos 'khor*" of 1076 organized by rTse-lde, shortly before his visit to Kashmir, rNgog, along with bTsan Kha-bo-che, gNyan Lo-tsā-ba Dar-ma-grags and others, studied the Treatises of Maitreya under bTsan's teacher Paṇḍita Prajñāna. From this, it is clear that bTsan's visit to Kashmir soon after that was motivated by this teacher. The statement is also a testimony that, before 1076, the [Five?] Treatises of Maitreya were known in mNga'-ris.[94]

It is thus clear that there was already, in 11th century India and in Tibet at the end of the 11th century, a notion that the Five Treatises had all been composed by Maitreya, revealed by Asaṅga, and formed some kind of set or unit. The very first Tibetan written statement regarding the Five Treatises might be a passage found in the beginning of rNgog bLo ldan Shes rab's *rGyud bla ma'i bsdus don:*

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[94]Translated in Kano, "rNgog Blo-ldan-shes-rab's Summary of the Ratnagotravibhāga: The First Tibetan Commentary on a Crucial Source for the Buddha-nature Doctrine," 97.

> When the Illustrious Maitreya clarified in an unmistaken way the intention of the discourses of the *sugata*, he presented the true meaning of the Mahāyāna by composing the treatise of the *Mahāyānottaratantra*, which teaches the precious *sūtra*s of definitive meaning (*nītārtha*), namely the irreversible wheel of Dharma, the *dharmadhātu* in a single system; and which precisely declares the meaning of all religious discourses (*dharmaparyāya*) which are very pure and certain. As for the act of making [sentient beings] worthy recipients for the explanation of the excellent (*samutkarṣika*) Dharma through the explanation of the purport of the *sūtra*s of provisional meaning (*neyārtha*), it must be achieved by explaining the two *alaṃkāra*s (*rgyan gnyis*) and the two *vibhāga*s (*'byed gnyis*). This is because they present the ultimate [truth] from the view point of the surface [truth] and the intention of other [systems].[95]

rNgog does name each member of the Five Treatises, and he does seem to think of them as a set sharing the same intent, for he defines the intent of each text in relation to the others. Yet he does not use the expression "Five Treatises" ("*Byams chos sde lnga"*) itself, so that for him these texts may have been considered as a set only insofar as they were all works of Maitreya.

The final stage of development of the tradition of the Five Treatises of Maitreya appears in works composed a little later, starting perhaps in the early 14th century and

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[95] Translation and edition by Kano, *"rNgog Blo-ldan-shes-rab's Summary of the Ratnagotravibhāga:The First Tibetan Commentary on a Crucial Source for the Buddha-nature Doctrine," 279, "theg pa chen po rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos 'di mdzad pas | theg pa chen po'i don gyi de kho na rnam par gzhag pa yin no || drang ba'i don gyi mdo sde'i don rnam par bshad pas yang dag phul gyi chos bshad pa'i snod du byed pa ni | rgyan gnyis dang rnam 'byed rnam pa gnyis bshad pas bya ste" (bsDus don, 1b4-2a1)*

continuing ever after. Here we find the label "*Byams chos sde lnga"* used profusely and explicitly as the subject of commentaries and in the title of texts. For example, in his *rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos rnam par bshad pa rin chen sgron me,* Blo gros mtshungs med uses the phrase "*bstan bcos rnam pa lnga"*, and treats directly the issue of which ones are provisional and which ones definitive.[96] kLong chen rab 'byams's biography also states that he wrote a commentary on all Five Treatises, the *Byams chos sde lnga'i spyi don sher mdo*[97]*,* indicating that he perhaps also considered them to be a single work and was acquainted with the expression "Five Treatises of Maitreya".

On the other hand, it is during the 14th century, with Dol po pa shes rab rgyal mtshan, that authors develop the theory that the Five Treatises all share the same intent and fall within the same category of tenets (*grub mtha').*

Around the 15th-16th centuries, we also have evidence of a debate taking place between various interpreters of the Five Treatises as to whether the Five formed a single work and, if so, in which order each of the Five Treatises was supposed to go. The leading argument of those who propounded the Five as a single work, the first and last part of which were respectively the AA and the RGV, was that since the other treatises did not contain the traditional statement of homage and dedication, they could not be independent works, and hence must be combined together to form a complete text in five parts. The fact that such a debate took place at that period in

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[96] *rGyud bla ma'i bstan bcos nges pa'i don gsal bar byed pa rin chen sgron me*, p. 11-12, "rnam par grol ba'i dga' ba dang bde' bas blo gros kyi lus ltas par byed pa'i bstan bcos bdud rtsi lhu skyes kyang gnang ste / de yang rgyan rnam pa gnyis dang / rnam 'byed rnam pa gnyis dang / theg pa chen po rgyud bla ma'i [13] bstan bcos te rnam pa lnga yin no /"
[97] See below, p. 103; Mathes, *A direct path to the Buddha within*, 92.

itself shows that the idea that the Five Treatises "went together", i.e., formed a single work and participated in a shared intent, was very well established at that period, at least much more than in the works of Sa-paṇ, for example, who at one point mentions only four of the Five Treatises as examples of teachings of the middle and final turning.[98]

At this point we can only conclude that a notion of the set of "Five Treatises" arose in India, at the latest in the 11th century, and that it was transmitted to Tibetan scholars who came to study those texts from Indian, and particularly Kashmiri, teachers. The concept probably arose out of the myth of the revelation of the teachings of Maitreya. Since the story of Asaṅga's reception of the texts from Maitreya, which itself can be dated as far as the 7th century and probably before, conveys the idea of a single revelation happening all at once, and since there are no other works or episodes of revelation from Maitreya in the Buddhist tradition, the idea that all Five Treatises represent a single act of revelation with a single intent arose. Once the myth of the revelation of Maitreya was accepted by the tradition, the discovery of new texts by Maitreya could only be explained by changing the story altogether, for example by adding episodes of revelation, or by changing the list of texts that had been revealed. Now once the RGV and DDV are discovered in the 11th century, since their author is clearly promoted as being Maitreya, the set of teachings given in the latter's revelation must have expanded so as to make a list of five.

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[98] See below, p. 89 ff.

We must not forget that the concept of Five Treatises has evolved even after it had been imported into Tibet. From just a list of texts, the tradition of the Five Treatises came to include notions such as that of the Five forming a single text. Those developments only made the need to resolve doctrinal tensions found between individual treatises more pressing.

2. Interpretations of the Five Treatises

rNgog Lotsāwa Blo ldan shes rab (1059-1109)

rNgog bLo ldan shes rab, due to his determining role in the establishment of the scholastic tradition in general, and especially of the theory of buddha nature in Tibet, had a great impact on Tibetan interpretations of the Five Treatises. As we have seen above, in addition to his role as a translator of the RGV, he probably is the first Tibetan author to mention the "Five Treatises" as a list.

Although his interpretation of the tathāgatagarbha set the tone for centuries onwards, his general approach to the Five Treatises is quite unique. As seen in the passage quoted above (p. 87), of the Five Treatises, rNgog recognized only the RGV as definitive.

By choosing that line of interpretation, rNgog in a way gives rise to the whole Tibetan tradition of having to reconcile two main trends found in the Five Treatises. It is noteworthy that at that early period rNgog did not see the conflict as arising principally between the AA and the other treatises, but between the doctrine of buddha nature and the other four. In this light it would be quite useful to know more about

how rNgog interpreted the AA – a topic which will undoubtedly have to be pursued as soon as possible, but that would reach beyond the scope of this dissertation.

The main impulse and lasting trademark of rNgog's approach to the Five Treatises is his reading of the doctrine of buddha nature as referring to emptiness, and hence representing the definitive Madhyamaka perspective. As opposed to later authors who interpret buddha nature as implicitly referring to emptiness, rNgog lo himself understood statements about that concept as literal references to emptiness.

As Kano points out, Kamalaśīla was a perhaps a predecessor of rNgog, for in the *Madhyamkāloka* he explains the buddha nature as selflessness and uses it to defend the single vehicle.[99]

Phya pa Chos kyi seng ge (1109-?)

Phya pa (sometimes spelled Phywa pa/Cha pa) chos kyi seng ge, whose influence on Tibetan scholasticism worked on many levels composed several texts dealing with the Five Treatises of Maitreya.

Phya pa composed commentaries on the RGV, the *Theg pa chen po rgyud bla ma'i bsdus don*) and the *Theg pa chen po rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos rgya cher bsnyad phra ba'i don gsal ba*.[100] He also composed a commentary and an outline of the Sūtrālaṇkāra, respectively

[99] Kano, "rNgog Blo-ldan-shes-rab's Summary of the Ratnagotravibhāga: The First Tibetan Commentary on a Crucial Source for the Buddha-nature Doctrine," 172.
[100]Published in Bka' gdams gsung 'bum I, vol. 7.

called the *mDo sde rgyan gyi legs bshad yang rgyan nyi 'od gsal ba* and the *mDo sde rgyan gyi lus rnam bzhag.* [101]

In one of the earliest Tibetan recensions of tenets (*grub mtha'*), the *bDe bar gshegs pa'i dang phyi rol pa'i gzhung rnam par 'byed pa*, Phya pa does not mention buddha nature in either the Mind Only or the Madhyamaka section.

'Gos Lotsāwa says that Phya pa composed "an extensive commentary on the *Spuṭārtha*", and that he composed "numerous commentaries on the 'Five Treatises' of Maitreya", as well as summaries of those texts. [102]

Although these sources remain mostly unexplored, we know, based on statements made in his Madhyamaka treatise, the *dBu ma de kho na nyid kyi snying po* (also known as *Shar gsum gyi stong thun*), that Phya pa seems to follow an approach both similar and different to rNgog's on the interpretation of the *tathāgatagarbha*: although Phya pa, as rNgog, sees the buddha nature as a synonym of ultimate truth, he believes that it is accessible to words and concepts, an idea rejected by rNgog.[103] In addition, we know that Phya pa agrees with rNgog on the question of spiritual potential (*gotra,* Tib., *rigs).*[104]

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[101] Bka' gdams gsung 'bum I, vol. 7.
[102] 'Gos Lo-tsā-ba Gźon-nu-dpal, *The blue annals*, 332.
[103] Kano, "rNgog Blo-ldan-shes-rab's Summary of the Ratnagotravibhāga: The First Tibetan Commentary on a Crucial Source for the Buddha-nature Doctrine," 189.
[104] Ibid., 192.

Sa skya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (1182-1251)

We cannot understand the place of the Five Treatises in Tibetan thought without some understanding of their interpretation by the great Sa skya hierarch, Sakya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan. More particularly, his position as an important founder of the Tibetan scholastic system as we know it, especially in its approach to Indian scripture, suggests that the way he interpreted the Five Treatises had a strong and lasting influence on the Tibetan tradition.

As with others, though, that does not mean that he chose to give particular authority or importance to the Five Treatises. On the contrary, he seems to have upheld yet limited the importance of those texts to important but secondary purposes.

First, Sakya Paṇḍita defines his understanding of the three turnings, and of the place of the Five Treatises therein, in the *Chos 'byung chen mo*, a text taken out of the supplementary section (*kha skong*) of his works. Here he includes among the middle turning and the collection of reasoning of Nāgārjuna two texts related to Maitreya-Asaṅga: the AA, which he says "implicitly" refers to emptiness and the path of Prajñāpāramitā, and Asaṅga's *de nyid rnam par nges pa*, the commentary he supposedly composed on the AA and Prajñāpāramitā in Twenty Thousand Verses.[105]

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[105] *Chos 'byung chen* mo, 96-97. "bar pa mtshan nyid med pa'i 'khor lo'i lta ba 'grel pa dbu ma rtsa ba shes rab dang / mngon rtogs rgyan gnyis mi 'dra ba'i rgyu mtshan ni yul dang yul can nam dngos shugs kyis byed pa'o / zhes 'chad do / 'di ltar mdo sde dngos su brjod pa stong nyid gsal bar byed pa slob dpon klu sgrub kyi rtsa ba shes rab dang rig pa drug cu dang / stong nyid bdun cu dang / rtsod zlog dang / ga las 'jigs med dang / zhib 'thag dang / tha snyad grub pa ste / rigs pa'i tshogs drug dang / Arya de ba'i bzhi brgya pa dang / lag tshar rab byed dang / zla ba grags pa'i dbu ma la 'jug pa tshig gsal dang / sangs rgyas bskyangs kyi 'grel ba buddha pa li ta la sogs rtsa 'grel la sogs yin la / shugs la bstan pa lam rim mngon rtogs brgyad du 'grel ba byams pa mgon po'i mngon rtogs rgyan dang / phyogs glang gi brgyad stong pa'i don bsdu ba dang daM ShTi se na'i 'bum TI ka dang / thogs med kyi de nyid rnam par nges pa dang /

Sa-paṇ includes in the final turning the *SA,* the *Madhyāntavibhāga* and its *ṭīka,* as well as Mind Only works of Vasubandhu and, notably, Asaṅga's *AS.*[106]

Finally he mentions texts that explain the practice of both the middle and the final turning, among which he includes the *YB*.[107]

Interestingly, Sa-paṇ mentions only three of the Five : the AA, SA and MV. He makes no mention of buddha nature related texts as belonging to either of the middle or final turning of the wheel, nor of the DDV.

It thus appears that altogether Sa-paṇ recognized the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* as definitive, but the four others as provisional. Although he does not mention explicitly the *Dharmadharmatāvibhaṅga*, there is no reason to suppose that he would interpret it differently from the *Madhyāntavibhāga* or the *Sūtrālaṅkāra*. The fact that he does not mention it in his *Chos 'byung chen mo* may indicate, although without certainty, that he may not have considered that text to be very important.

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dbyig gnyen gyi nyi khri gzhung 'grel / 'phags pa grol sde'i nyi khri snang ba dang / btsun pa grol sde'i nyi khri rnam 'grel / seng bzang gi brgyad stong 'grel pa dang / rin chen sgron ma dang / sangs rgyas ye shes kyi sdud 'grel dang / bi ma la mi tra'i shes snying rgya cher 'grel dang / shAnti pa'i dag ldan la sogs pa'o /"

[106] Chos 'byung chen mo, 97, "tha ma don dam nges pa'i lta ba / kye rgyal ba'i sras dag khams gsum par snang ba 'di dag sems tsam mo zhes pa'i don 'grel pa / slob dpon thogs med kyi mngon pa kun btus dang / byams mgon po'i mdo sde rgyan dang / dbus mtha' dang / dbyig gnyen gyi nyi shu pa dang / sum cu pa dang / phung po lnga'i rab tu byed pa dang / rten 'brel chen mo dang / dbus mtha'i Ti ka rnam bshad rig pa dang / phyogs glang gi dmigs pa brtag pa la sogs pa'o / "

[107] Chos 'byung chen mo, 97, " bar pa dang tha ma gnyis kyi spyod pa gzhan don snying rje chen po kun rdzob byang chub kyi sems gsal bar byed pa slob dpon thogs med kyi sa sde lnga dang / zhi ba lha'i bslab btus dang / spyod 'jug dang / mdo kun las btus pa dang / klu sgrub kyi rin chen phreng ba dang / bshes spring dang / sems 'grel dang / mdo kun las btus pa la sogs pa dang / tsandra go rmi'i sdom pa nyi she pa dang / slob ma la spring yijg dang / rta dbyangs kyi mi dge ba bcdu bstan pa dang / jo bo rje'i byang chub lam sgron dang / spyod pa bsdus pa'i sgron ma dang / lam rim la sogs pa'o /"

As Jinpa noted, Sa-pan did not explain his reading of Buddha nature extensively; in the *Mkhas 'jug*, though, he does mention, "the buddha essence and so forth were [taught] for the sake of drawing people such as those who hold onto the self,"[108] implying that it is not to be taken literally.

In the *Thubs pa'i dgongs pa rab gsal*, he also mentions that if the mind mentioned in the *'Da' kha ye shes* is the Buddha, then one would cultivate the idea that there is no need for further exertion.[109] Interestingly, the section of this text dealing with the *Sūtrālaṅkāra* explains it not according to the stages of the path set down in the AA, but rather according to the *gotra* theory as set forth in the MSA.

In his explanation of the three vows, the *Sdom gsum rab dbye*, Sa-pan makes his position on the buddha nature more explicit. He explicitely identifies the *sugatagarbha* with the realm of reality (*chos kyi dbyings*)[110]; He does assent to the theory that the *tathāgatagarbha* is the shared nature of sentient beings and the *tathāgata*, albeit in a "Mādhyamika" sense, i.e., as emptiness.[111] Sa-paṇ also critizes the idea that the *tathāgatagarbha* is a matrix made of the union of emptiness and compassion - a theory related to the notion that it is unstained and equivalent with the *dharmakāya*. Sa-paṇ rather claims that emptiness and compassion are what purify the buddha nature.[112] This suggests a definition of *sugatagarbha* similar to what we find in the thought of Tsongkhapa, that is as the potential for enlightenment in the temporary state where it

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[108] *mKhas pa'i rnams la 'jug pa'i sgo*, 210; cf. Jinpa, *bde gshegs snying po rigs kyi chos skor*, xxvii.
[109] *Thub pa dgongs gsal*, Sa skya bka' 'bum, vol. tha, p. 54.
[110] Verse 61; translated in *A Clear Differentiation of the Three Codes*, 49.
[111] Ibid., verse 62-3
[112] Ibid., verse 72, p.50.

is associated with contaminated elements. Unlike Tsong kha pa, though, Sa-paṇ rejects the theory that an allusion to emptiness can be considered as definitive. In the *sDom gsum rab dbye*, Sa-paṇ defines the *sugatagarbha* as "the clarity aspect of the *ālaya-vijñāna*", although not as part of the eight consciousnesses (verses no. 126-127)[113]. Thus it is not to be identified with the realm of sentient beings (*sems can gyi khams*), which would make it impossible for it to be unconditioned (no. 125). In the same text he refers to the *tathāgatagarbha* as free from elaborations (no. 132) and provisional (no. 140) - lest it amount to an *ātman* - and as refuted by Candrakīrti (no. 142).

Finally, in the *Skyes bu dam pa rnams la zhu ba'i phrin yig* he explains that,

> Regarding the Tathāgata-matrix, I have seen it taught as an interpretable principle in the *Laṅkāvatāra*, the *Uttaratantra*, the *Madhyamakāvatāra*, and other sūtras and [basic Indian Buddhist] treatises. Please investigate whether or not what I have said concurs with that which is expounded in all sūtras and treatises.[114]

Thus, overall, Sa-paṇ takes a rather critical look at the doctrine of the *sugatagarbha* and *tathāgatagarbha*: he limits it to the category of provisional teachings that allude indirectly to emptiness for the purpose of those who are not ready to hear the teachings of selflessness. Looking ahead, we must note the similarity of this interpretation with the one later adopted by Tsongkhapa, except that Sa-paṇ classifies *tathāgatagarbha* as provisional. Together with the classification of the Five Treatises

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[113] Verses 126-7. See translation in Sa-skya Paṇḍi-ta Kun-dga'-rgyal-mtshan, *A Clear Differentiation of the Three Codes*, 56-58.
[114] Translated in Ibid., 237-238.

mentioned earlier, Sa-paṇ's interpretation of those concepts suggest that he was little inclined to make extra efforts to reconcile the doctrines of the Five Treatises with his overall Madhyamaka theory, and felt comfortable leaving those elements as provisional teachings on the path, to the exception of the *Abhisamayālaṇkāra*. As Ruegg mentions, it seems that Sa-paṇ's interpretation remained prevalent among Sa-skya pas for a while, and was shared by kLu sgrub rgya mtsho and by Red mda' ba in the earlier part of his life.[115]

Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1292-1360)

Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan was undoubtedly one of the most sympathetic interpreters of the Five Treatises of Maitreya, which he placed at the very center of his doctrinal system. His interpretation, which was influential among his followers of the Jo nang and so-called *gzhan stong* tradition, is also unique. For our present purpose, we can limit our description of its unique features as the combination of the following features. First, Dol po pa categorizes all Five Treatises as belonging to the final turning of the wheel of Dharma. Second, he labels the final turning, and hence all Five, as conveying teachings that are definitive in meaning. Third, as a corollary to this feature, in contrast to the orientation taken by most other interpreters, it is not by representing the middle turning and the teachings of self-emptiness that the Five Treatises gain the status of definitive teachings. On the contrary, Dol po pa identifies the teachings of the middle turning, such as those found in the collection of reasoning

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[115] Ruegg, *La Théorie Du Tathāgatagarbha Et Du Gotra; Études Sur La Sotériologie Et La Gnoséologie Du Bouddhisme*, 58. Ruegg's claim that Rong ston also followed that view, which he himself recognizes as uncertain, does not seem warranted. See below for Rong ston's position on the Five Treatises.

of Nāgārjuna, as being provisional. In the following lines I explain these features in a little more detail.

Dol po pa's interpretation is to my knowledge the only one that reads all Five Treatises – even the AA and the RGV - as belonging to the final turning.[116] As is the case with a lot of features of Dol po pa's thought, his interpretation depends on a complete rereading of so many features of the Mahayana doctrine that it stands in a category of its own. As we saw above and will see in more detail below, the majority of Tibetan interpretations formulated between the 11th and the 16th centuries consider some or all of the Five Treatises as being definitive or provisional mostly based on whether they can be read or not as treatises on the intent of the middle turning. Dol po pa inverts the debate by reading all Five Treatises as definitive, but for opposite reasons, namely because he reads them as defending the position of Great Madhyamaka, i.e. of the final turning, which includes buddha nature, other-emptiness, and so forth in a long list of synonyms[117]. For him it is rather the middle turning that is provisional; in contrast with most other interpretations, to read the AA or the RGV as representing the middle turning and hence the teachings of essencelessness – which he calls "self-emptiness" – would amount to relegating them to a lower status in the hierarchy of teachings.[118] To my knowledge Dol po pa is also the only author who reads the AA as belonging purely to the final turning.

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[116] Cf. Hopkins, Hopkins, *Mountain Doctrine*, 27.
[117] Cf. for example Stearns, *The Buddha from Dolpo*, 130,, where all the following are given as synonyms: "the ultimate buddha-body of reality, the ultimate perfection of transcendent knowledge, the ultimate Madhyamaka, the ultimate nirvāṇa, and the ultimate great enlightenment."
[118] Hopkins, *Mountain Doctrine*, 12-15, 26-27; Jinpa (Intro.), *bde gshegs snying po rigs kyi chos skor*, xxvi.

In the *Chos 'khor bsdu ba bzhi*, he introduces the criterion of cosmological periods as a tool for interpreting texts. Making a distinction between four periods, he favors teachings of the *Krtayuga* as being more authoritative than others.[119] Their authority is hence great but not exclusive, as it is shared with that of the final authoritative teachings of the Vajrayāna.

There has been a tendency in scholarship, possibly due to the influence of unsympathetic secondary sources on the thought of Dol po pa, to stress, even overstress, his belief in the incompatibility of the middle and final turning of the wheel of Dharma. In general one cannot interpret the labeling of a teaching as provisional as a rejection or lack of appreciation, but simply as a feature of one's interpretation. Stearns quotes the following useful statement of Mati Panchen, Dol po pa's direct disciple:

> The meaning of the Middle Wheel is the manner in which the relative is empty. The meaning of the Final Wheel is the manner in which the absolute is empty. Since they teach the nonexistence of what does not exist, and the existence of what does exist, the ultimate intention of both are identical.[120]

Ultimately, both turnings of the wheel are identical; yet since the teachings of the middle turning teach only the emptiness of relative phenomena, and those of the final turning teach the emptiness of the ultimate, the former are provisional and the latter definitive.

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[119] Stearns, *The Buddha from Dolpo*, 81.
[120] Translated in Ibid., 86-87.

Strictly from the point of view of the Five Treatises, though, Dol po pa stands out as very sympathetic and bent towards harmonization. On one hand, Dol po pa's interpretation is very inclusive, for it does not exclude any of the Five Treatises from the category of definitive teachings. On the other, it does so at the price of reading all the teachings of the middle turning as provisional. Thus it is inclusive and sympathetic towards the Five Treatises, but more critical towards other parts of the Mahāyāna canon. Dol po pa's claim that even the AA represents the Final Turning is characteristic of his concern for all definitive teachings to represent his view of other-emptiness; he is not comfortable with the idea that the middle and final turnings should be considered at the same level of definitiveness.

Bu ston Rin chen grub (1290-1364)

Bu ston rin chen grub, the compiler of the final version of the Tibetan canon, the *bka' 'gyur* and *bstan 'gyur*, contributed significantly to all fields of Buddhist scholarship in Tibet, including the Five Treatises. As for his position on these texts, in the index to the *Bstan 'gyur*, he classified only the AA as belonging to the Prajñāpāramitā section, and he put all four remaining treatises in the Mind Only section. In doing so he was not only following the established tradition of labeling the *Sūtrālaṇkāra* and *Madhyāntavibhāga* as Cittamātra scriptures, but also making an explicit statement regarding the status of the RGV, which many authors starting with rNgog had interpreted as representing Madhyamaka.

His only direct contribution on the interpretation of the Five Treatises is a commentary on the AA, the *Shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i man ngag gi bstan bcos mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan zhes bya ba'i 'grel pa'i rgya cher bshad pa lung gi snye ma*[121], essentially an elaboration on Haribhadra's commentary. In some of his other Prajñāpāramitā commentaries, such as his commentary on the *Shes rab snying po*, Bu ston interprets the meaning of the Prajñāpāramitā through emptiness of other (*gzhan stong*). His interpretation is unique insofar as he reads the Prajñāpāramitā in the form of emptiness of other, yet rejects a reading of buddha nature in that same light.

Although he wrote two texts on buddha nature, namely his famous *Bde bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po gsal zhing mdzes par byed pa'i rgyan*[122] and a summary of buddha nature, the *De bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po'i bsdus don rin po che gser gyi lde mig*[123], he did not express his views on buddha nature in commentaries on the leading śāstra on the topic, the RGV. The first of these texts presents buddha nature by quoting from a variety of sources, obviously with the goal of refuting Jo nang pa interpretations of buddha nature from the perspective of *niḥsvabhāvavāda* Madhyamaka.[124]

In general, Bu ston's interpretation of buddha nature follows the main trend set by rNgog, namely, of equating it with emptiness; yet he does not consider it as a literal definitive meaning (*nges don sgra ji bzhin pa*) but rather as an interpretable statement

[121] Collected Works of Bu ston rin chen grub, vol 18, 7-732.
[122] vol. 20, p.7-84. Translated in Ruegg, *Le traité du Tathāgatagarbha de Bu ston Rin chen grub*.
[123] vol. 19, 653-662. As Ruegg points out (*Op. cit.*, p. 2), this text is merely a subject division of the Tathāgatagarbhasūtra.
[124] See Ruegg, *Le traité du Tathāgatagarbha de Bu ston Rin chen grub*, 2-5, 27, etc.

made with a particular intention.[125] As Ruegg relates, Bu ston's disciple Sgra tshad pa described Bu ston's position on the buddha nature as agreeing with Sa-paṇ's position.[126] Thus although the buddha nature is identical with the body of reality (*ngo bo nyid sku)*, it is not present within sentient beings.[127] That being said, understanding Bu ston's position is further complicated by the fact that in the *bsdus don* he characterizes buddha nature as definitive so that, as Ruegg suggests, we probably have to distinguish in his thought between the doctrine of universal enlightenment and the one vehicle, and the doctrine of the substantial presence of buddha nature in sentient beings.[128]

Thus, Bu ston refuses to read buddha nature as a fully definitive doctrine, for as it is equated with emptiness, its language is indirect and intentional (*dgongs can)*, i.e., it refers indirectly to the *ālayavijñāna* (as basis of intention, *dgongs gzhi)* with the motivation (*dgongs pa)* of eliminating the five faults.[129]

kLong chen rab 'byams (1308-1363)

kLong chen rab 'byams is considered as one of the most important teachers of the rNying ma school, and his writings obtained, at least for that school, a close to canonical status.

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[125] See Jinpa (Intro.), *bde gshegs snying po rigs kyi chos skor*, xxvii., Ruegg, *Le traité du Tathāgatagarbha de Bu ston Rin chen grub*, 27, 49.
[126] Ibid., 22.
[127] Jinpa (Intro.), *bde gshegs snying po rigs kyi chos skor*, xxvii.
[128] On this see Ruegg, *Le traité du Tathāgatagarbha de Bu ston Rin chen grub*, 27-28, n.5.
[129] Ibid., 90, 105. The five faults are mental discouragement, despising humble beings, accepting the unreal, despising real dharma, and excessive love for oneself.

Two biographies of kLong chen pa, the *Dad pa 'jug ngos* of gLag bla bSod nams chos grub and the *mThong ba don ldan* of Chos grags bzang po, mention a commentary on the whole of the Five Treatises composed by kLong chen pa[130]. As that text, like many of kLong chen pa's works, is unfortunately not available, we can only guess at kLong chen pa's interpretation of the Five Treatises indirectly from statements made about individual texts and doctrines related to them.

kLong chen pa seems to want to read *tathāgatagarbha* as a doctrine of definitive meaning. We can infer from his reading of that doctrine his position on the RGV. He comments on that doctrine in a few of his works, notably the, *Grub mtha' mdzod, Śiṅ rta chen po, Yid bźin mdzod 'grel, Sems ye brtag pa* and *Tshig don mdzod*, as well as in several other sources.[131] Wangchuk describes kLong chen pa's approach to tathāgatagarbha as "positive-mystical"[132], yet different from Dol po pa's insofar as it does not ascribe hypostatic existence to the tathāgatagarbha. He sums it up in the following way:

> Kloṅ-chen-pa offered one of the most sophisticated interpretations of the TG [*tathāgatagarbha*] theory in Tibet, and it has since served as the standard for the later rÑiṅ-ma interpretations. Although he assessed TG quite positively, he did not deviate from the rDzogs chen concept of emptiness beyond all extremes.[133]

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[130] See Wangchuk, "The rÑin-ma Interpretations of the Tathāgatagarbha Theory," 187.
[131] See Ibid., 187-9.
[132] Ibid., 196.
[133] Ibid., 184.

The excellent qualities attributed to the *tathāgatagarbha* are also not reduced to mere absence of 'hypostatic existence' but their teachings are accepted literally. [134]

The *tathāgatagarbha*, and hence the RGV, is of definitive meaning, yet is not taken so by reducing the meaning of that concept to that of emptiness in general.

We must note that Klong chen pa succeeded in integrating tathāgatagarbha in his Madhyamaka system based on his general interpretation of the correspondence of that view with tantra and especially Rdzogs chen. Mathes says that, "Longchenpa explains how the all-pervading luminosity of buddha nature (as established by the three reasons in RGV I.27) can be divided into the two aspects of emptiness and appearance, so as to accord with both types of potential."[135]

Finally, in the *Grub mtha' mdzod*, Klong chen pa makes an equation between the perfected nature (*parinișpannasvabhāva*), the buddha nature and two other synonyms, *gnas lugs* (nature) and *don gyi kun gzhi* (the real ālaya). As Mathes puts it, "By weaving these terms into the presentations of a lower vehicle, he establishes connection between the Yogācāra and the primordial or real ground, and thus shows that already the Cittamātra presentation of the ground is itself compatible with the highest view of dzogchen."[136]

In brief, although Klong chen pa does integrate *tathāgatagarbha* within his system as definitive, it is not an essential part of it. He reads it as a definitive doctrine, but

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[134] Ibid., 193.
[135] Mathes, *A direct path to the Buddha within*, 108. Wangchuk (187) points out that that connection between *tathāgatagarbha* and 'self-occurring gnosis' is also found in Rong gzom pa's writings.
[136] Ibid., 105.

without fully identifying it with emptiness, connecting it rather to positive language found in the Vajrayāna. In doing so, he follows his approach of reading Madhyamaka in general as going beyond mere exclusion, reading emptiness as the union of the two truths, hence of clarity and emptiness.

It amounts from such a discussion that for Klong chen pa the problem of the tension between the different trends found in the Five Treatises is not so dramatic. His reading of Madhyamaka already provides for cohabitation between the two main trends at work, without subordinating either one to the other completely. This feature of his thought perhaps contributes to making it mysterious to interpreters who assume that a thinker must choose sides in facing these issues. As we shall see below, Klong chen pa's interpretation of the Five Treatises, or at least the little we know or can deduce about it, shares a lot of features with that of the Third Karmapa, Rang byung rdo rje, and perhaps can be seen as an inspiration for the theory put together later on by Śākya mchog ldan.

Third Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje (1284-1339)

The third Karmapa, Rang byung rdo rje, had a lasting influence as a systematizer and propagator of the Mahāmūdra and rDzogs chen traditions. He also wrote extensively to comment on scriptures associated with the third turning of the wheel of dharma. He summarizes his interpretation of the Five Treatises in the beginning of his *Chos dang chos nyid rnam par 'byed pa'i bstan bcos kyi rnam par bshad pa'i rgyan*. He describes the AA as a teaching on the middle turning, the MSA on all turnings, the *MV* as teaching "the meaning of all characteristics of [afflicted and purified phenomena] up through the unsurpassable yāna", and the *Dharmadharmatāvibhaṅga* as illuminating "the meanings

of samsara and nirvana."[137] In this passage, Rang byung rdo rje avoids the terminology of provisional and definitive meanings, except where he states that the RGV "teaches the actuality of the nature of phenomena, the basic nature of buddhahood, the final definitive meaning [...]".[138] As Brunnhölzl remarks, Rang byung rdo rje's general approach can be seen as a synthesis between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra elements, stressing the compatibility of the two systems. As he puts it,

> He skillfully crafts a synthesis that consciously uses the elements of both systems, which–despite their sometimes differing hermeneutical approaches–are grounded in the same mahāyāna foundation, to supplement each other in furthering one's understanding of their common ground and to arrive at the same personally experienced wisdom of realizing the nature of one's own mind.[139]

In addition, in the same text, he explicitly states that he considers the Five Treatises to form a single work.[140]

In other works, such as his commentary on the *Dharmadhātustava*, Rang byung rdo rje stresses the unity of view between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra. As Mathes reports, in the *Zab mo nang gi don,* the Third Karmapa shows "how the doctrine of buddha nature can be blended with mahāmūdra and dzogchen in a tantric context."[141] This can be taken as an indication that he does not consider the teachings on *tathāgatagarbha*,

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[137] Rang byung rdo rje and Brunnhölzl, *Luminous Heart*, 82.
[138] Brunnhölzl, *Luminous Heart*, 85.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Brunnhölzl, Nāgārjuna, and The Third Karmapa, Rang byung rDo rje, *In praise of dharmadhātu*, 161.
[141] Mathes, *A direct path to the Buddha within*, 52.

dharmadhātu, etc. found in the Five Treatises to be in conflict with the teachings of the AA. Hence, although no clear statement is made in those words, Rang byung rdo rje seems to consider all Five Treatises as definitive, stressing moreover that there is no tension of contradiction between them.

The general impulse of the third Karmapa's system is doctrinally very inclusive towards the Vajrayāna and teachings of the final turning such as the *tathāgatagarbha*. Hence for him it would seem that all Five Treatises are of definitive meaning, although he does recognize a certain difference in their views, especially in the case of the AA. His commentaries on the *Dharmadharmatāvibhaṅga* and RG bring Vajrayāna terminology (such as *rig pa*, etc.) into the interpretation of the Five Treatises. We can thus say that he develops an interpretation of the Five Treatises that is made from the point of view of Vajrayāna, and oriented towards practice and meditative terminology rather than towards philosophical debate between positions.

Blo gros mtshungs med (early 1300s)[142]

bLo gros mtshungs med, a teacher associated with gSang phu monastery, is particularly known for his commentary on the rGyud bla ma, the *Rin chen sgron me*.[143] In that text, he states that he considers the RGV and the AA as representing definitive Madhyamaka teachings, but not the three others.

[142] For a dating of Blo gros mtshungs med the author of the *rGyud bla ma'i bstan bcos kyi nges don gsal bar byed pa rin po che'i sgron me*, see Kano, "rNgog Blo-ldan-shes-rab's Summary of the Ratnagotravibhāga: The First Tibetan Commentary on a Crucial Source for the Buddha-nature Doctrine," 582-586.
[143] On that text, see e.g., Mathes, *A direct path to the Buddha within*, 91-98.

> As for which of those [five] are provisional and which ones are definitive, some say that the first four are of provisional meaning. This is wrong, for [that would mean that] the first Ālaṃkāra (i.e., the AA) does not explain correctly the meaning of the middle turning, and explains teachings of provisional meaning, such as explanations of the intent of teachings of the first turning.[144]

He also develops an interesting discussion of the status of texts usually associated with the provisional Mind Only doctrines:

> Those people are also incorrect when they say that since the two *Vibhāgas* and the MSA are of provisional meaning, because while they teach the Mind Only's dependent and perfected natures as ultimate, the latter are subject to refutation by another intellect. For whereas [those texts] do accept the dependent nature as ultimate, they do not hold it to be subject to refutation by another intellect. For if the *dharmatā,* which for ever has been empty of the twofold self and the twofold grasping, is indeed fully established, although it is accepted as the

[144] bLo gros mtshungs med, *rGyud bla ma'i 'grel pa rin chen sgron me*, 13, "*de dag la drangs pa dang nges pa'i don can gyi gsung rabs ni gang zhe na kha cig na re / dang po bzhi ka yang drang ba'i don gyi gsung rabs kyi don gsal byed pa ste zhes gsung pa ni ma yin te / rgyan dang pos bka' 'khor lo bar pa'i don phyin ci ma log par ma bshad par 'gyur te / drang pa'i don gyi gsungs rabs 'chang ('chad) byed yin pa'i phyir / 'khor lo dang po'i dgongs 'grel rnams bzhin no /*" Kano interprets that passage in a slightly different way: "Somebody (i.e. rNgog) said that the first four (i.e. the Five Treatises of Maitreya except for the RGV) are [treatises] that clarify the contents of provisional teachings. [However], this is not true. [If that were so, it would follow that] the first alaṃkāra (i.e. Abhisamayālaṃkāra) would not correctly explain the meaning of the Second Wheel of Dharma, since because [rNgog said that the Abhisamayālaṃkāra] is [a treatise] which explains a provisional text (though it explains actually a definitive scripture), just like commentaries (dgongs 'grel) on the first wheel of Dharma." (p. 197-8) But the absurd consequence bLo gros mtshungs med attributes to his opponent is more likely to just be that, were the AA not to be definitive, it would have to explain the teachings of the first turning, an interpretation which would place the Prajñāpāramitā, the widely recognized topic of the AA as belonging to the first turning. bLo gros mtshungs med does not seem to consider the possibility that at least parts of Prajñāpāramitā might be understood as representing the final turning, a thesis that would be defended by Dol po pa.

> ultimate truth, it cannot be refuted by other intellects, because it is the nature of all phenomena.[145]

bLo gros mtshungs med might be one of the first authors to use the term "*byams chos lnga*" ("Five Treatises of Maitreya").

Red mda' ba gZhon nu bLo gros (1349-1412)

Although Red mda' ba, insofar as is available at the moment, does not make explicit mention of his interpretation of the Five Treatises, we have a clear account of his views coming from sTag Tshang LotsAwa. In his *Grub mtha' kun shes,* sTag Tshang describes Red mda' ba's interpretations of the Five Treatises as follows:

> Although, of the Victor Maitreya's five dharmas, the SA and the two Distinctions, both in their presentation and subject, represent mainly the mind only position, the scholar g.yag ston accepted that all five were Mādhyamika [texts]. Against that, when [Red mda' ba] Gzhon nu blo gros said, "gzhan gyis chos rnams kyang yod la", knew to explain each of them simply by means of mind only. Although most others, since they accord with mind only, explain the AA and the RGV as mind only, those two texts are explained by Asanga and Vimuktisena, etc. as Madhyamaka, and since no one can deny that the three others are explained by Vasubandhu as mind only, the Omniscient great lotsāwa

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[145] *Rin chen sgron me,* 18, "yang de dag na re / rnam 'byed gnyis dang / mdo' sde rgyan ni sems tsam pa'i gzhan dbang dang yongs grub don dam par ston pa la blo gros gzhan gyi gnod pa 'bab pas drang don yin zhes pa 'ang mi 'thed / gzhan dbang don dam par 'dod na blo [glo] gros gzhan gyi[s] gnod pa 'bab kyang khas mi len la / bdag gnyis dang gzung 'dzin gnyis [19] kyis gdod ma nas stong pa'i chos nyid ni yongs grub yin la / de don dam pa'i bden par khas len kyang blo gros gzhan gyi gnod pa mi 'bab ste / chos thams cad kyi gnas lugs yin pa'i phyir ro /"

(skyabs mchog dpal bzang) interpreted that the two are Madhyamaka and the three others are mind only, those three positions summarize all positions.[146]

In his *Blue Annals*, 'Gos lotsāwa describes thus Red mda' ba's evolution of thought regarding the RGV and *tathāgatagarbha*:

> The Venerable Red-mda'-pa believed at first the *Uttaratantra* to be a Vijñānamātra work, and even composed a commentary from the standpoint of the followers of the Vijñānamātra school. Later, when he became a hermit, he used to sing: 'It is impossible to differentiate between the presence and absence of this our Mind. The Buddha having perceived that it penetrated all living beings, as in the example of a subterranean treasure, or the womb of a pregnant woman, had proclaimed all living beings to be possessed of the Essence of the Sugata'."[147]

There is a statement on Thu'u bkwan's *grub mtha'* that Red mda' ba critized the *gzhan stong* view[148]. In his *lTa ba'i shan 'byed*, Go rams pa criticizes other-emptiness apparently by directly quoting a whole section out of Red mda' ba's words–that may be the critique

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[146] Stag tshang, *Grub mtha' kun shes*, p. 216, "Rgyal ba byams pas mdzad pa'i chos lnga las mdo sde rgyan dang 'byed gnyis ni dngos bstan dang bstan bya'i gtso bo sems tsam kho nar gnas pa la / mkhas pa g.yag gis lnga ga dbu mar bzhed pa dang / de'i log bsnon du / mkhas pa gzhon blos / gzhan gyis chos rnams kyang yod la / zhes sogs re re tsam ni sems tsam pas kyang 'chad shes la / ghzan phal cher sems tsam dang mthun pas mngon rtogs rgyan dang rgyud bla yang sems tsam du bzhed mod kyi / de gnyis thogs med dang grol sde la sogs pa'i mkhas pa chen po dag gis dbu mar bkral zhing / gzhan gsum dbyig gnyen gyis sems tsam du bkral ba la sus kyang bcos pa med pas / lo chen thams cad mkhyen pas [skyabs mchog dpal bzang] gnyis dbu ma dang sum sems tsam du bkral ba'i dbu ma'i gzhung gnyis po kun sogs zad do"

[147] In 'Gos Lo-tsā-ba Gźon-nu-dpal, *The blue annals*, 349. See also Ruegg, *La Théorie Du Tathāgatagarbha Et Du Gotra; Études Sur La Sotériologie Et La Gnoséologie Du Bouddhisme*, 59.

[148] Thu'u kwan Blo-bzaṅ-chos-kyi-ñi-ma, *The Crystal Mirror of Philosophical Systems*, 209.; Thu'u kwan Blo-bzaṅ-chos-kyi-ñi-ma, *grub mtha`shel gyi me long*, 230.

to which Thu'u bkwan was referring to.[149] His criticism of other-emptiness at least is coherent with how his position on the Five Treatises has been described by sTag tshang and 'Gos lo tsāwa.

Tsong kha pa bLo bzang grags pa (1357-1419)

Tsongkhapa Blo bzang grags pa was probably the most influential thinker of Tibetan Buddhism leading into the 15th Century, and his interpretation of the Five Treatises was certainly also one of the most influential.

Tsongkhapa deals directly with the Five Treatises at a few places. As Jinpa relates it, he explained clearly his reading of the Five Treatises, and the solution to the tension found in the category, in both the *dGongs pa rab gsal*, his commentary on the *Madhyamakāvatāra*, and in his famous *Drang nges legs bshad snying po*, which deals precisely with the question of definitiveness and provisionality of the Buddha's teachings.[150] In *dGongs pa rab gsal*, Tsongkhapa states explicitely that, of the Five Treatises, he considers the *Abhisamayālaṇkāra* and *Ratnagotravibhāga*, to be definitive, while the *Sūtrālaṇkāra*, *Madhyāntavibhāga*, and *Dharmadharmatāvibhaṅga* are provisional. He gives as reason for that classification that, while the first two texts argue in Mādhyamika fashion, the three others defend the three nature theory and negate the existence of external objects - features of the tenets of Cittamātra.[151]

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[149] *lTa ba'i shan 'byed, 25-42.* See Go-rams-pa, Cabezón, and Dargyay, *Freedom from Extremes*, 96-113. Cabezon and Dargyay translate that section as a summary of Red mda' ba's views rather than as a direct quotation of his words.
[150] Jinpa (Intro.), *bde gshegs snying po rigs kyi chos skor*, xxvii-xxviii.
[151] Ibid., xxviii.

The way in which Tsongkhapa interprets the Ratnagotravibhāga as Madhyamaka is in itself very significant. On one hand, in *Legs bshad snying po*, he criticizes the acceptance of buddha nature as a definitive teaching - at least in the absolutist sense, i.e., as permanent, unchanging, and the equivalent of the dharmakāya.[152] On the other hand, in *dGongs pa rab gsal*, Tsongkhapa does defend a definitive concept of tathāgatagarbha, synonymous with *buddhadhātu* (*bde bar gshegs pa'i khams*), serving as a cause or seed of buddhahood, defined as the suchness of the mind of sentient beings while associated with polluted aspects - in other words as a synonym for emptiness. He also recognizes the necessity of the acceptance of that concept in order to avoid the absurd consequence of buddhahood being without a cause.[153] Thus Tsongkhapa's interpretation of buddha nature, consistent with the interpretive trend set by rNgog, opens the door for his inclusion of the RGV as following the Madhyamaka approach, and its inclusion as a definitive teaching. Although Tsong kha pa himself did not write a commentary on the RGV, his interpretation of buddha nature was taken up by rGyal tshab Dar ma rin chen in his commentary on the RGV.

We must note that the way Tsongkhapa interprets *tathāgatagarbha* shows an aspect of the complexity of the hermeneutics at work around that concept and suggests an important distinction needing to be made with regards to the categories of provisional and definitive meanings. Whereas Tsongkhapa acknowledges tathāgatagarbha as definitive, we cannot say without qualification that he accepts it literally, for the essence of his interpretation is that tathāgatagarbha is a metaphor for emptiness that

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[152] Ibid.
[153] dGongs pa rab gsal, 243.

applies to the specific context of the mind of sentient beings. Hence tathāgatagarbha is definitive only insofar as it is reduced to emptiness. Explaining it as referring indirectly to another term does not strictly speaking question the literality of the expression, for when defined in Tsongkhapa's way it does mean emptiness. But if we recognize that the equation of the two terms is not self-evident, for example if one does not *prima facie* assume that *tathāgatagarbha* should mean the emptiness of mind, then it appears more like a claim that *tathāgatagarbha* can *not* be taken literally as the essence or matrix of the Buddha, but is a sort of figurative language. It thus seems safer to use the term "definitive" to represent *nges don*, since it is not completely synonymous with "literal". As is often the case, Tsongkhapa's interpretation of that concept involves questioning some presuppositions we may have regarding *tathāgatagarbha*, and redefining the term in a purely Madhyamaka sense.

Rong ston Shes bya kun rig (1367-1449)

Śākya mchog ldan mentions that Rong ston follows primarily Sa paṇ's tradition of interpretation of the Five Treatises.[154] In his commentary on the RGV, though, he defines the *tathāgatagarbha* as a simple negation compatible with emptiness.[155] He thus seems to adopt the model of accepting RGV and AA as definitive, while leaving the rest in the category of provisional teachings.

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[154] Śākya mchog ldan, *Mus rab 'byams pa'i dris lan*, 308. See Kano, "rNgog Blo-ldan-shes-rab's Summary of the Ratnagotravibhāga: The First Tibetan Commentary on a Crucial Source for the Buddha-nature Doctrine," 221.
[155] Ibid., 218-219.

Rong ston's interpretation of the Five Treatises is important in that it was adopted by his followers sTag tshang pa and Go rams pa, whose Madhyamaka system became extremely influential in the Sa skya school.

3. Analysis and typology of interpretations

We thus find a quite rich variety of interpretations of the Five Treatises even when limited to 4 centuries of Tibetan thought. Following the model set forth in the SNS, Tibetan authors, starting with rNgog, accept that the most fundamental category for the interpretation of those texts is that of definitive vs provisional meaning. We can summarize the different positions under four main groups:

1. The authors who view all Five Treatises as definitive, namely Dol po pa and the Third Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje, interpret them as Great Madhyamaka texts. They agree with others that the RGV is definitive, but they disagree on *how* it is–they reject the theory that the buddha nature theory should be read as a synonym for the emptiness of *niḥsvabhāvavāda* Madhyamaka. Given that Rang byung rdo rje sees a great deal of unity between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra, it remains to be seen precisely how he understands the unity of the AA and of the other four treatises.
2. Several authors came to accept the theory that both the AA and RGV are definitive insofar as they teach the emptiness of *niḥsvabhāvavāda*: Blo gros

mtshungs med, Rong ston, Tsong kha pa and possibly kLong chen pa[156]. The main feature of that interpretation is the interpretation of buddha nature and the RGV in rNgog's style, reading the AA as explicitly teaching the *niḥsvabhāvavāda* view, and the three others as being provisional statements of Mind Only doctrine. According to a statement by sTag tshang pa, sKyabs mchog dpal bzang also followed that approach. rNgog lo, we must note, differs from the majority of his followers insofar as he saw the AA as provisional.

3. Among the more sceptical interpreters, Sa paṇ rejects the reading of RGV as teaching emptiness, and accepted only the AA as definitive.
4. Red mda' ba, at least in the earliest part of his career, according to sTag tshang pa, read even the AA as a Mind Only scripture.

All five are definitive	AA and RGV are definitive	Only the AA is definitive	Only RGV is definitive	All five are provisional
Rang byung rdo rje, Dol po pa	bLo gros mtshungs med, Tsong kha pa, Rong	Sa skya Paṇḍita	rNgog lo	Red mda' ba (early career)

[156] We do not have a clear statement of the latter's position on the AA, MV, MSA and DDV; as he does seem to reject a *gzhan stong* reading of buddha nature, I suspect that, while defending a great degree of continuity between Cittamātra and Madhyamaka, he would still label the last three of these four as Mind Only.

	ston, kLong chen pa (?)			

We thus have two main criteria in evaluating those interpretations: how each text is interpreted and how the status of definitive scripture is granted. There is little contention as to the way the MSA, MV and DDV are interpreted: most authors agree that they represent the Yogācāra perspective. There is substantial disagreement, though, on the status of those teachings: whereas for Dol po pa and Rang byung rdo rje it represents the final view of Great Madhyamaka, others see it as a provisional teaching.

Contention about the interpretation of the texts themselves arises mostly about the RGV and AA. The interpretation of the RGV is much debated: whereas some read it as a Mind Only provisional doctrine, some read it as a definitive statement of the emptiness of *niḥsvabhāvavāda*, and some as a statement of the Great Madhyamaka view.

RGV is definitive		RGV is provisional (as Mind Only)
As *niḥsvabhāvavāda*	As Great Madhyamaka	Red mda' ba, Sa skya Paṇḍita
rNgog, Phya pa, bLo gros mtshungs med, Bu ston, Rong ston, Tsong kha pa	Dol po pa, Rang byung rdo rje	

A similar pattern applies to the AA. It is read either as a definitive statement of Great Madhyamaka, as a definitive statement of *niḥsvabhāvavāda*, or as provisional Mind Only doctrine, the latter position being held only by rNgog and presumably by Red mda' ba.

AA is definitive		AA is provisional (as Mind Only)
As niḥsvabhāvavāda	As Great Madhyamaka	Red mda' ba
bLo gros mtshungs med, Rong ston, Tsong kha pa, Sa skya Paṇḍita, Rang byung rdo rje?	Dol po pa	

When we analyze those positions, we find that there are two main kinds of debates at work in the interpretation of the Five Treatises. First, there is a complex yet purely exegetical discussion of the meaning taught in those texts, revolving around the following questions: does the AA teach the middle turning view of emptiness or other-emptiness? Does the RGV make indirect statements about the emptiness taught in the Prajñāpāramitā, or does it describe non dual gnosis in the style of Yogācāra or other-emptiness? Do the scriptures associate with Mind Only by many Tibetans, such as the MV, the AA and the DDV, teach the ultimate existence of consciousness?

Interpretations of the Five Treatises also treat of more general, purely hermeneutical issues, such as the identification of what constitutes definitive and provisional meaning, and the categorization of particular texts in relation to those categories. The

few interpretations we have surveyed allow us to distinguish the beginning of a picture of the main hermeneutical strategies used to interpret the Five Treatises, and the doctrinal tension they contain.

First, the most popular strategy, which we could call the *niḥsvabhāvavāda* hermeneutic, resolves the tension by identifying the definitive meaning as the emptiness taught in the middle turning, and categorizing texts which do not agree with that view as provisional. We need to be clear on the complexity of what is at work here: there is a hermeneutical decision made as to what constitutes definitive meaning, followed by an exegetical analysis of texts that determines whether they qualify or not. The texts and doctrines categorized as provisional are not definitive because the view they teach does not agree with emptiness. The most important feature of that type of hermeneutics is that it takes view (Tib., *lta ba)* as the category used to determine the definitive or provisional status of scriptures. We must stress that categorizing a text as provisional does not constitute a rejection or criticism of its teaching, but simply that it is not recognized as a valid statement of the ultimate view of reality, but rather as useful as a description of some other soteriological function, such as drawing people on the path or reducing attachment to external objects.

Second, the model of interpretation which apparently differs the most from the *niḥsvabhāvavāda* hermeneutic is doubtless the one provided by Dol po pa, in which all Five Treatises are categorized as definitive. To understand how that system, which I would call the *gzhan stong* hermeneutic system, works, we need to pay attention to the following points. First, Dol po pa resolves the doctrinal tensions found in the Five Treatises on purely exegetical grounds. All five are definitive, but they also all teach

the view of Great Madhyamaka as other-emptiness. Thus, in itself, Dol po pa's interpretation does not need to create a new hermeneutical model. When put in the context of Dol po pa's general interpretation of Madhyamaka, though, we find that his system does contain hermeneutical strategies developed to resolve contradictions found in the Buddhist scriptures. His interpretation of Madhyamaka, as mentioned above, involves categorizing the whole of *niḥsvabhāvavāda* as provisional. He does have a hermeneutical model to reconcile Mahāyāna doctrine; he just does not use it in the context of the Five Treatises. Contrary to what we would expect, his hermeneutics of Madhyamaka sources, although yielding results directly opposite to the views of *niḥsvabhāvavāda,* do not fundamentally reject the *niḥsvabhāvavāda* hermeneutic. The very fact that he treats *niḥsvabhāvavāda* as incompatible with doctrines such as Great Madhyamaka and buddha nature shows that he reads all these doctrines as views of reality—i.e., as ontological doctrines. Accepting a logical contradiction between emptiness and buddha nature, in itself, amount to recognizing that these doctrines are given in the same context. Dol po pa does limit the scope of those two kinds of ontological assertions: while buddha nature and other-emptiness define the view of the ultimate truth, emptiness describes the nature of relative truth. He nonetheless presents both these kinds of statements as ontological statements, and in that way does not diverge so far from the *niḥsvabhāvavāda* hermeneutic, which is based on ontological views. In a word, the *gzhan stong* hermeneutic differs from the *niḥsvabhāvavāda* model in its identification of what constitutes definitive and provisional meaning, but not in its taking ontology as a standard for reconciliation. There is no doubt that behind the hermeneutical disagreement as to what constitutes definitive meaning, those two

systems also contain considerable philosophical differences. We can say that, for Dol po pa, emptiness as a simple negation is not an adequate description of ultimate reality in all contexts. Due to Dol po pa's exegesis of the Five Treatises, though, he does not see that philosophical problem as arising in those texts. The differences between those two systems are very considerable on the side of the exegesis that flows from those hermeneutic principles.

The interpretation of the Five Treatises that is most difficult to classify is probably that of the Third Karmapa, Rang byung rdo rje. We saw that, although he classifies all Five Treatises as definitive, he does not do so by changing fundamentally the meaning of what *niḥsvabhāvavāda ;* for him, a variety of perspectives seem to be able to coexist at the level of definitive meaning. He also brings in the perspective of Vajrayāna as a way of organizing the two trends found in the Five Treatises as representing emptiness and clarity, the two aspects of the ultimate identified in tantric Buddhism. We can thus perhaps talk of a Vajrayāna hermeneutic but, as we have little detail about how he develops his hermeneutics, we cannot really understand fully his position.

The main conclusion we can draw from this analysis and typology is that, although the different interpretations of the Five Treatises we have surveyed varied in their categorization of individual texts, they agreed in their main hermeneutical orientation: ontological statements define doctrines as being definitive or provisional. Overall, how these two categories are defined accounts for most of the disagreement between the different interpretations. Although there are philosophical differences behind the main hermeneutical strategies, they do not arise in the context of the Five Treatises themselves.

Chapter 3: Śākya mchog ldan's defense of the definitive meaning of the Five Treatises in the *Byams chos lnga'i nges don rab tu gsal ba*

The present chapter looks at the last interpretation of the Five Treatises this dissertation studies: that of the Sa skya thinker gSer mdog Paṇ chen Śākya mchog ldan. As was briefly mentioned in the Introduction, I treat his interpretation separately for several reasons: 1) he developed it at the end of the formative period of Tibetan Buddhism during which most major interpretations were formulated, and responded to the major positions we have outlined in chapter 2; 2) the uniqueness of Śākya mchog ldan's interpretation makes explicit the principles that underly the Tibetan synthesis of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra elements found in the Five Treatises; 3) Śākya mchog ldan is himself one of the most sympathetic and sophisticated interpreters of the Five Treatises. The system of interpretation he creates is original and unique, not falling within any other major system. Thus, despite the fact that he did not gain over time a great number of followers of institutional legacy, the thought of Śākya mchog ldan can be considered as one of the most important of the history of Tibetan Buddhism.

Śākya mchog ldan presents partly his views on the interpretation of the Five Treatises in many texts;[157] yet the most detailed and focused exposition of his hermeneutics of the Five Treatises is found in a relatively concise text called simply the *Byams chos lnga'i nges don rab gsal* (*Complete Elucidation of the Definitive Meaning of the Five Treatises of Maitreya*) (BCN*).* The title of the text sets from the start the nature of the issue: the main question regarding the interpretation of the Five Treatises is their status as Mahāyāna scriptures, which is captured in many hermeneutic categories, the foremost of which is the set of provisional/definitive meaning (*neyārtha/nitārtha,* Tib., *drangs pa'i don/nges pa'i don,*)*.* This text explains in detail how Śākya mchog ldan thinks we should interpret the meaning of the Five Treatises, including the question of the order in which they were taught, which ones belong to which turning (*bka' 'khor lo*) and to which tenet (*grub mtha'*) each belongs, how we should understand the meaning of each treatise in terms of categories of *sūtras*, which practical purpose each treatise fulfills, an evaluation of the different trends of interpretation of the Treatises that arose in India and Tibet, the relation between the different Treatises, and the condensed meaning of the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, which Śākya mchog ldan considers to be the interpretive key of the Five Treatises. Since the BCN is the main source for Śākya mchog ldan's interpretation of the Five Treatises, and since it provides substantial information about Śākya mchog ldan's approach to the topic, I propose here: 1) a summary of the main themes and issues that arise in it, with the hope of drawing a concise but clear portrait of his views on this topic; and 2) an analysis of what Śākya mchog ldan's discussion tell

[157] See below, ch. 4 for Śākya mchog ldan's interpretation of the Five Treatises in other texts and links to the rest of his thought.

us about interpretations of the Five Treatises in general. In particular, we will see how Śākya mchog ldan makes clear that the debates surrounding the Five Treatises really depend on textual hermeneutics, more particularly on the identification of soteriological function of religious doctrines in relation to principles of interpretation. In short, Śākya mchog ldan's discussion highlights the fact that most debates and disagreements surrounding the Five Treatises depend primarily on the preference of different authors for certain practical functions as defining standards of interpretation against which to evaluate doctrines. Although Śākya mchog ldan disagrees with most other interpretations of the Five Treatises—and especially with the *niḥsvabhāvavāda* hermeneutic—he does not reject the ontological view they are associated with. The translation of the section of the text which deals with the definitive meaning of the Five Treatises is also provided below in Appendix I.

1. The *Byams chos lnga'i nges don rab tu gsal ba*

The BCN is unfortunately difficult to date precisely, for its colophon does not mention the year in which it was composed, but simply that Śākya mchog ldan wrote it down

while staying in gSer mdog can monastery—an indication which in itself tells us very little, since Śākya mchog ldan resided in that monastery most of the time after 1471.[158]

The title of the text as we have it seems to be incomplete. In the rest of his works, Śākya mchog ldan follows the Tibetan custom of naming his compositions with two-fold titles: except for short texts or letters, titles usually include a poetic or metaphorical name and a phrase summarizing the topic of the text. The present *Byams chos lnga'i nges don rab gsal* only mentions the topic of the text, without any poetic name given to the text. This strongly suggests that the topic statement, the *Thorough Clarification of the Definitive Meaning of the Five Dharmas of Maitreya*, was not the original title, but that it was added by the editor of the printing of Śākya mchog ldan's collected works, presumably because the original title was lost. The title only appears on the title page and not in the body of the text itself. Whereas it is sometimes the custom in Tibetan printed editions to reprint the title of the text on the first page of the body of the text, we have no such mention here.

The only mention of the topic and possibly original title of the text we find in the body of the text itself suggests that Śākya mchog ldan's original composition had a different title. After the traditional elements of homage and promise of composition, borrowed by Tibetan from the Indian literary tradition, the first prose line describes the text, not as dealing with the definitive meaning of the Five Treatises, but as being the

[158] Cf. Komarovski, *Echoes of Empty Luminosity: Reevaluation and Unique Interpretation of Yogācāra and Niḥsvabhāvavāda Madhyamaka by the Fifteenth Century Tibetan Thinker Śākya mchog ldan*, 112. As Komarovski reports, gSer mdog can was named as such in 1476; it was before that time known as gZi lung.

"*Clarification of the Condensed Meaning of the* Madhyāntavibhāga"[159]—probably the original title of the text. Unless we find some mention of the text in other works, it is only possible to vaguely guess at what the poetic part of the title might have been. The poetic homage at the beginning of the text uses metaphorical connection where the light of the Five Treatises clarifies the (definitive) meaning of *ye shes*, non dual gnosis.[160]

Although in all probability the text was originally composed as a summary of the *Madhyāntavibhāga,* the editors' decision to name it an explanation of the definitive meaning of the Five Treatises is not unfounded, for in addition to such a summary, composed in the traditional summary (*bsdus don*) style, the text contains a lengthy introduction dealing with the order of the Five Treatises and their definitive meaning. The introduction is in fact longer than the summary: it runs from pages 1 to 27, while the summary occupies only the last ten pages of the document (27-37). Śākya mchog ldan identifies the three main parts of his text as: 1) the order of the Five Treatises; 2) what their definitive meaning is and how it is explained by Asaṅga and Vasubandhu; and 3) the summary of the *Madhyāntavibhāga.*[161] The polemical section of the text, which most clearly sets Śākya mchog ldan's position against his opponents', being the introduction, the editors were justified in specifying it as defining the text's principal topic. As we will see below, since Śākya mchog ldan's main thesis is precisely that the

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[159] BCN, 2, "[...] zhes mchod par brjod pa dang / rtsom par dam bca' bsngon du btang nas / dbus mtha' rnam par 'byed pa zhes bya ba'i bstan bcos kyi bsdus pa'i don rab tu gsal ba zhes bya ba 'di la gsum ste /" The text contains many obvious typographical mistakes that need to be corrected to make any sense. In the present chapter, where necessary, I translate and quote from the text following critical emendations to the text as described in Appendix 1. All translations are my own as presented in the same Appendix 1.

[160] BCN, 2, "/thogs med shing rta'i lam du nges rgyu ba'i / bstan bcos rnam lnga'i nyin byed snang ba yis / brjod bral lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes mchog / theg chen lung brgya'i nges don 'di na gsal /"

[161] BCN, 2, "[...] rje btsun gyi chos lnga'i go rim dang / nges pa'i don gang yin pa dang / de nyid thogs med mched kyis ji ltar bkral ba'i tshul dang / bye brag tu bstan bcos 'di nyid kyi bsdus pa'i don gang yin pa'o /

MV explains the definitive meaning of all Five Treatises, the difference between the two titles is in the end not very substantial, even though the title given in the edition might mislead us to think that Śākya mchog ldan wrote a text on the Five Treatises as an independent treatise not connected to any particular text.

Approximately following Śākya mchog ldan, I will present here his views under the topics of the order of the Five Treatises, their doxographic classification, and the summary of their general meaning. The reader will thus hopefully be presented with a general picture of his interpretation of those scriptures, namely an intricate whole where all texts represent the metaphysical view of Madhyamaka, albeit with different methods and different emphases pertaining to different hermeneutical categories such as intellectual establishment and application, the Middle and Final Turnings of the Wheel, provisional and definitive, self and other-emptiness, the vast and profound approaches to the Mahāyāna, and view and practice. I will not dwell in detail on Śākya mchog ldan's presentation of the MV, which does not add much to his general interpretation of the Five Treatises.

2. The Order of the Five Treatises

The first issue Śākya mchog ldan brings up in the interpretation of the Five Treatises of Maitreya is that of the order in which they were composed. This is not, as it might

seem, a secondary or even insignificant issue, for both Śākya mchog ldan and his philosophical opponents shared the belief that the Five Treatises formed, at least to a certain extant, a unit and, thus, served a single purpose. In a way, the order of the Five Treatises does not determine the relation between five independent works, but the sequence of the parts of a single work.

The question of the order does not pertain simply to knowing which of the treatises was composed first, but rather probably of where each one "goes", that is, in which order they should be read and what relationship they hold towards each other. In the interpretation of Śākya mchog ldan and others, this issue comes to have a great importance, as the content and meaning of treatises coming "before" the others becomes understood as the object of subsequent treatises. This ordering creates a dynamic where later texts become exegetically more primary, because they constitute explanations of earlier treatises. As I explain below, at least in Śākya mchog ldan's opinion, understanding the proper order of the texts goes along with understanding the intent and meaning of the Treatises.

The pertinence of the question of the order of the Five Treatises, though, depends primarily on its relation with the issues of the doxographical classification of the treatises and the identification of the subject matter of each treatise. The doxography of the Five Treatises entails claims that certain treatises represent a more authoritative view than others, depending among other things on their subject matter, and these aspects are reflected on the order assigned to the five texts.

Following that model, the rival view Śākya mchog ldan takes as a starting point for discussion is that, based on the formal consideration that the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* gives the verse of homage and the *Ratnagotravibhāga* gives the dedication of merits, these two must be the first and last of the series.[162] Since all Indian Buddhist treatises start with an homage and end with a dedication, and since the other three treatises do not include their own homage and dedication, we must deduce that they form a single work, and that the two texts we just mentioned must represent the beginning and end of the Five Treatises. These first and last treatises also are considered by Śākya mchog ldan's opponents as the only two scriptures representing the middle turning and definitive meaning, so that the Five Treatises compose a sandwich of provisional meaning within an outer layer of literal meaning: that "sandwich" model thus ties the meaning of the text with their order. This is significant, as one of the rationales for explaining texts as provisional is that they have soteriological value even though they are not totally accurate from the point of view of ontological descriptions of reality. The three middle treatises thus are provisional in that they are given for soteriological purpose, while the definitive view is explained at the beginning and end of the Treatises.

For our purpose the issue of the order of the Five Treatises is important primarily because it helps identify Śākya mchog ldan's main methodological approach, which we could summarize as a privileging of subject and of a certain method over form and second order interpretive tools such as doxographical categories. In other words,

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[162] BCN, 3, "dang po ni / bod kyi slob dpon dag na re / mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan ni thog mar gsungs shing / rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos ni tha mar gsungs pa yin te / da[ng] po la mchod brjod dang / tha ma la bsngo ba mdzad pa'i phyir / "

Śākya mchog ldan defends a new reading of the Five Treatises uncontaminated by presuppositions such as the definitions of the different schools of thought of Mahāyāna and their degree of authoritativeness, or at least by such presuppositions as were common in his days—all of which are extraneous to the texts themselves. This is shown to some extent in his answer to the formal argument based on the homage and dedication, which is rejected due to the fact that both the homage, which is phrased as a homage to the specific topic of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, and the dedication, which follows the pattern of the Seven Conditions of Indestructible Reality—specific to the *Ratnagotravibhāga*—are specific to the works in which they are contained.[163]

The order of the Treatises, Śākya mchog ldan tells us, must be established on different grounds—their subject and intent. Based on that reading, their order is described thus :

> ...The two *Alaṅkāra*s and the *Uttaratantra* were given first, because they were composed in order to make easier the understanding of the *sūtras* and their meaning by treating each of them separately. The two *Vibhaṅgas* came last, because they are texts explaining these treatises and they have for subject the stages of practice of the path that derives from them.[164]

The order Śākya mchog ldan gives the Five Treatises is thus : 1) *Abhisamayālaṇkāra,* 2) *Sūtrālaṇkāra*, 3) *Ratnagotravibhāga,* 4) *Madhyāntavibhāga*, 5) *Dharmadharmatāvibhaṇga.* In

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[163] BCN, 4, "mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan gyi mchod brjod ni / bstan bcos rang gi brjod bya'i gtso bo la mchod phyag mdzad pa yin pas rgyan rang gi thun mong ma yin pa'i mchod brjod yin la / rgyud bla mar 'byung ba'i bsngo ba yang rdo rje'i gnas bdun tshul bzhin bshad pa'i dge ba yul mchog tu bsngo ba yin pas bstan bcos de rang gi thun mong ma yin pa'i phyir /"

[164] BCN, 4 "rgyan gnyis dang rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos te gsum ni theg pa chen po'i mdo so so dang sbyar nas mdo de dang de'i don bde blag tu rtogs pa'i ched du sbyar ba'i bstan bcos yin pas thog mar 'chad rigs la / 'byed rnam pa gnyis ni / bstan bcos de dang de nas 'byung ba'i brjod bya'i lam nyams su len pa'i rim pa ston byed yin pas tha mar rigs pa yin no /"

thus setting forth the order of the Five Treatises Śākya mchog ldan forewarns us, first, that he sees the difference between the three first treatises as depending mainly on their different subject matter, i.e., three units of meaning found in the sūtras and, second, that he sees some treatises, namely the two *Vibhaṅgas*, as being subordinate to the other ones to the extant that their purpose is to explain the meaning of the first three. Let us notice though, that although the two *Vibhaṅgas* are subordinate in terms of order and intent, exegetically speaking they are primary : since they are presented as keys to the interpretations of the first treatises, they are considered to be more explicit and hence exegetically more direct. Of these two texts Śākya mchog ldan, later in the text, explains that the *Madhyāntavibhāga* is particularly important, because it is in fact a commentary on the intent of the first two treatises:

> After these three comes the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, for in it the meaning established in the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, which is directly recognized by the *Sūtrālāṅkāra*, is explained as the path of the Middle Way and joined with the conduct taught in the sūtras, as well as the exposition of the stages of cultivation [of that path].[165]

The order ascribed to the Five Treatises by Śākya mchog ldan thus gives a prominent role to the *Madhyāntavibhāga* as the interpretive key explaining the common intent of the two most hard to reconcile treatises, the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, pertaining to the *Prajñāpāramitā*, and the *Sūtrālāṅkāra*, which comments on the final turning. Thus, even on the question of the order of the Five Treatises, Śākya mchog ldan shows his

[165] BCN, 12, "de'i 'og tu dbus dang mtha' rnam par 'byed pa'i bstan bcos mdzad pa yin te / mngon rtogs rgyan gyi nges don mdo sde'i rgyan gyis ngos bzung ba de nyid dbu ma'i lam du bshad nas de nyid mdo sde nas 'byung ba'i spyod pa dang sbyar nas / ji ltar sgom pa'i rim pa ston pa'i don de mdzad pa'i phyir /" See below for a discussion of this point.

preference for the *Madhyāntavibhāga* as the most important, from the point of view of interpretation, of the Five. That explains in part the fact that the whole discussion of the definitive meaning of the Five Treatises, following which this text came to be named, occurs as a preliminary to Śākya mchog ldan's Summary of the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, which is the main object of the text.

Apart from giving more importance to the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, Śākya mchog ldan, in thus defining the order of the texts, shows that for him the differences in language or concepts between the different treatises do not reflect the adoption by the author of different views or tenets, but simply result from each text treating a different subject matter, a different part of the Mahāyāna sūtras. The unity of view between all Five Treatises, as we shall see below, is as important to Śākya mchog ldan as the favouring of *Madhyāntavibhāga* as the interpretive key to the Five Treatises. Let it be noted, though, that for Śākya mchog ldan, although all five Treatises adopt the Madhyamaka point of view, there is still room for a certain variety of views within Madhyamaka and, thus, certain texts can be distinguished from others based on their perspective, notably the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra,* which is closer to the *rang stong* view of Madhyamaka and the middle turning of the Wheel of Dharma.[166]

3. The Doxographical Classification of the Five Treatises

[166] This reading of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* as representing *rang-stong* is emphasized by Tārānātha as distinguishing him from Dol-po-pa. Cf., Tārānātha, *The Essence of Other-Emptiness*, 121. As we will below, even this is nuanced by Śākya mchog ldan.

Śākya mchog ldan's main point of contention with other interpreters of the Five Treatises is that the latter all give one or a few, if not all, of the Five a secondary status of authority as scriptures of provisional meaning requiring further interpretation. In contrast, Śākya mchog ldan claims that all Five Treatises are treatises of definitive meaning representing the final intent of the Buddha and suitable for literal interpretation. In the *Byams chos lnga'i nges don rab gsal*, Śākya mchog ldan defines his position in opposition of one main rival view, which he summarizes thus: "As for the manner [in which the Treatises] express their subject, [they claim that] the first and last are Madhyamaka treatises and the three intermediate texts are Mind Only treatises."[167] From the outset we can recognize the popular position associated with the *niḥsvabhāvavāda* hermeneutic of the Five Treatises, which combines an identification of definitive meaning with *niḥsvabhāvavāda*, yet interprets buddha nature as an indirect statement of emptiness.

First, this rival "sandwich" position considers the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* a Madhyamaka scripture because, 1) it is a commentary on the intent of the middle turning and 2) because it is explained thus by Haribhadra.[168] Second, according to that position, the *RGV* is a Madhyamaka treatise because, it "mainly expounds a simple negation rejecting all extremes appearing under the name of Buddha-nature" and, "because it is

[167] *Ibid.*,, 3, " brjod bya'i don ston tshul yang thog mtha' gnyis ni dbu ma'i bstan bcos dang / bar pa gsum ni sems tsam gyi bstan bcos te / ..."
[168] BCN, 3, "mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan ni 'khor lo bar pa'i dgongs 'grel yin pa dang / 'phags seng gi dbu mar bkral ba'i phyir dang / ..."

commented upon by Asaṅga in the manner of the proponents of essencelessness."[169] The three 'middle' treatises represent the Mind Only position because of two reasons: 1) they clearly explain the constructed nature as not truly established and the dependent and perfected natures as truly established, and 2) one cannot find any scriptural source explaining those three texts as Madhyamaka.[170]

As we saw in chapter 2, in the *Dbu ma'i byung tshul* (his *History of the Arising of Madhyamaka,* BBT), Śākya mchog ldan points out that although different positions have been argued, during his lifetime it is the view that he criticizes here – that the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* and the *Uttaratantra* are Madhyamaka treatises – that had become prevalent.[171] The main focus of his critique can thus be identified as the *niḥsvabhāvavāda* reading of the Five Treatises.

Śākya mchog ldan's strategy in answering this rival interpretation of the Five Treatises can be summarized under four main points: 1) Privileging the commentaries on the texts of the collection of the Five Treatises by Asaṅga and Vasubandhu over those of other commentators, especially rNgog and his followers; 2) A greater emphasis and importance on passages from the Five Treatises that qualify or reject the reification of mind/consciousness as ultimately real; 3) A systematic harmonization of the Five

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[169] BCN, 3, "rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos ni de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po'i ming can spros pa'i mtha' thams cad bkag pa'i med par dgag pa de nyid brjod bya'i gtso bor ston pa'i phyir dang / thogs med zhabs kyis ngo bo nyid med par smra ba'i tshul du bkral ba'i phyir dang / ..."

[170] *Ibid.,* 3-4, " bstan bcos bar pa gsum du ni kun btags bden par med pa dang / gzhan dbang dang yongs grub bden par grub pa'i tshul gsal bar bshad pa'i phyir dang / 'di gsum dbu mar 'grel byed kyi tshad lan su yang ma byung ba'i phyir / zhes gsung ngo /"

[171] *Dbu ma'i 'byung tshul,* 225, "...bod phyi ma dag las / la la ni / lgna char yang sems tsam pa nyid du nges / zhes dang / kha cig ni / thams cad dbu mar nges zhes dang / phyi dus 'di na / thog mtha' gnyis dbu ma dang / bar pa gsum sems tsam du nges sam zhes dbyangs gcig tu smra bar byed mod / ... "

Treatises as *gzhan stong* Madhyamaka 4) A reclassification of the Mahāyāna sūtras in order to reflect the subject matter of the Five Treatises.

1. Privileging the authority of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu

A few of the arguments developed by Śākya mchog ldan pertain to exegesis and involve proofs based on scripture. One of the points Śākya mchog ldan makes against his opponents pertains to a specific point of his method of interpretation. In short, the issue lies with the way to determine the authority a commentator has in explaining the meaning of scriptures such as the Five Treatises, and in particular where that authority is derived from. In three passages Śākya mchog ldan rejects scriptural arguments based on the fact that he does not consider the Indian commentators cited as having authority to comment on the treatises of Maitreya due to their own doctrinal biases, or at least as not having exclusive or definitive authority. In other words, although all commentators are allowed their interpretation, some of them cannot be taken as holding final authority unless they fulfill certain conditions, and some others are considered to be more authoritative due to specific factors.

The first of these instances is discussed as one of the main proofs Śākya mchog ldan attributes his opponents in the determination of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* as representing the *niḥsvabhāvavāda* tenet. This argument is "of faulty pervasion" (*khyab pa 'khrul pa)*, i.e., that Haribhadra describes this text as being a *niḥsvabhāvavāda* text does not entail that it is a scripture of *rang-stong* Madhyamaka, for *rang-stong* does not "pervade" Madhyamaka, which includes also *gzhan stong* Madhyamaka. This hinges also on a

criticism of accepted doxographical categories going against both beliefs common at his time and the prejudices in which Haribhadra himself seemed to indulge. Second, Haribhadra's comments do not correspond with Vasubandhu's and Dignāga's comments on the subject, which establish that scripture as Madhyamaka, yet not as *rang-stong*–noting on the way that this destroys the view that all *gzhan stong* is also necessarily the same as Mind Only.[172] That Haribhadra classifies it as Mind Only because it represents the *gzhan stong* view does not establish its status definitively because a) that classification of schools is not adequate and b) because this contradicts the position of more authoritative commentators, namely, Vasubandhu and Dignāga.

In the discussion of the status of the *RGV* as belonging to Madhyamaka or not, Śākya mchog ldan relates an objection based on Candrakīrti's statement that the Madhyamaka that he propounds is not found apart from the MMK of Nāgārjuna[173], and that hence those scriptures of Maitreya and Asaṅga must represent not Madhyamaka, but Cittamātra[174]. Śākya mchog ldan's answer has two parts: first, from a textual point of view, there are many statements in the Five Treatises emphasizing that Mind does not really exist, thus making it impossible for these texts to qualify as Mind Only. Second, Candrakīrti's criticism has no convincing power for,

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[172] BCN, 9, "'khor lo bar pa'i dgongs 'grel yin pa tsam gyis ngo bo byid med pa'i tshul du gnas par khas len na / ji skad du / bstan bcos chen po'i rnam bshad mdzad / ces dang / shes bya nang gi yin pa la / zhes pas skabs nas 'byung ba'i 'grel pa rnams kyis ma nges pa dang / yang 'phags seng gis bkal (bkral) ba tsam gyis der nges na dbyig gnyen dang / phyogs [9] kyi glang pos bkral ba tsam gyis ni gzhan stong 'chad pa'i bstan bcos su nges par yang rigs la / de lta na ni khyed cag gzhang stong smra ba'i bstan bcos thams cad sems tsam gyi bstan bcos su khas blang pa dang 'gal lo /"
[173] Cf. Madhyamakāvatāra, 11, 53, " 'di las gzhan na chos 'di ni / ji ltar med pa de bzhin du / 'dir 'byung lugs kyang gzhan na ni / med ces mkhas rnams nges par brjod /
[174] BCN 6,"gal te ji skad du / slob dpon zla bas / 'di las gzhan na chos 'di ni ?? / ji ltar med pa de bzhin du / zhes bshad pas na byams chos bar pa gsum gyi dgongs pa dbu mar mi gnas so she na / 'o na gang du gnas / sems tsam du'o zhe na /"

> Otherwise, if we need to explain that every Madhyamaka treatise does not contradict the *Madhyamakāvatāra*, all the treatises of Svātantrika Madhyamaka, Nāgārjuna's *Bodhicittavivarana* and *Dharmadhātustotra*, as well as even Candrakīrti's own *Pradīpadyotana* become uncertain, because you accept that the Svātantrika view is refuted in the *Madhyamakāvatāra*, and because non-dual gnosis is explained as ultimately real that-ness in the *Bodhicittavivarana*, etc.[175]

Śākya mchog ldan's answer to a similar issue raises the same point with a little more detail:

> Should one object: but did Ārya Vimuktisena not interpret the intent of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* in the manner of the self-emptiness, and did Asaṅga not explain thus the intent of the *RGV*? Although Ārya Vimuktisena did indeed interpret thus the final meaning of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, it must be said that that interpretation is made in conformity to the thought of Nāgārjuna, and does not follow the intent of the scriptures of Ārya Maitreya, because it does not follow the interpretation of the *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras found in the four later scriptures of Maitreya. Thus, this is no problem, because of the two great traditions of interpretation of the intent of the Prajñāpāramitā as Madhyamaka, the one adopted by Ārya Vimuktisena is only one. For example, the intent of the *Catuḥśataka* is interpreted by the Glorious Dharmapāla in the manner of the

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[175] BCN, 6. "de las gzhan du dbu ma'i bstan bcos gang yin thams cad 'jug pa rtsa 'grel dang mi 'gal par 'chad dgos na / dbu ma rang rgyud kyi bstan bcos rnams dang / klu grub zhabs kyi byang chub sems 'grel dang / chos dbyings bstod pa sogs dang / zla ba'i zhabs rang kyis mdzad pa'i 'grel chen sgron ma gsal ba sogs kyis ma nges par 'gyur te / dbu ma la 'jug par rang rgyud pa'i lta ba bkag par khyed cag khas len pa'i phyir dang / byang chub sems 'grel sogs su ni gnyis med kyi ye shes de nyid don dam pa'i bden par bshad pa'i phyir ro / "

emptiness of other, and it is not the case that it is not interpreted in the way of Madhyamaka.[176]

The important point common to these scriptural arguments is that the authority a commentator has to interpret a text can be justified in two ways. First, if one has predetermined that an author such as Candrakīrti represents a view that is authoritative – in our case that of so-called Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka – then that author's interpretation gains more interpretive authority from the fact that the most authoritative view distinguishes better issues of provisionality-literality, the two truths, etc. Since Candrakīrti represents the most accurate and advanced exegetical approach, his classification of every doctrine—not only the one he adopts as his own—precedes those of other interpreters. Again, that means that the place Candrakīrti's system gives to certain doctrines supercedes the place these doctrines and texts claim for themselves.

Second, one can reject such an approach based on the fact that regardless of the accuracy of the view defended by an author, if that view does not correspond to the view of the text or tradition the commentator is evaluating, then the commentary has no interpretive authority. Śākya mchog ldan rejects some commentaries based on the

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[176] BCN 8. "gal te 'o na 'phags pa grol sdes rgyan gyi dgongs pa rang stong smra ba'i tshul du bkral ba dang / thogs med zhabs kyis rgyud bla'i dgongs pa yang der bkral ba ma yin nam zhe na / 'phags pa grol sdes rgyan gyi nges don de ltar bkral ba yin mod / bkral ba de ni klu sgrub zhabs kyi dgongs pa dang mthun zhes 'chad du rung yang rje btsun byams pa'i gzhung gi dgongs par song ba ma yin te / byams chos phyi ma bzhi pos shes phyin gyi mdo'i dgongs pa bkral ba dang ma mthun pa'i phyir / de lta (r) na yang mi 'thad pa ni ma yin te / shes phyin gyi mdo'i dgongs pa dbu mar 'grel ba'i shing rta chen po'i srol gnyis las / gcig ni 'phags grol (sde) gyi 'chad tshul de nyid yin pa'i phyir / dper na bstan bcos bzhi brgya pa'i dgongs pa dpal ldan chos skyong zhabs kyis gzhan stong gi tshul du bkral kyang dbu mar ma bkral ba ma yin pa bzhin no /"

fact that, although they are authentic Indian sources, they still represent an outsider's point of view on Yogācāra (which he equates with *gzhan stong* Madhyamaka), which is really only defended by Asaṅga, Vasubandhu, and some of their followers such as Dignāga, Sthiramati, etc. The argument he levels against his opponents is that of pre-determining the meaning of a text–here the scriptures of Maitreya–based on the pre-determination that Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka is a more authoritative view. In a sense, he is advocating an insider's approach where a view cannot be interpreted save from its proponent's statements. However I do not think that, for Śākya mchog ldan, that principle applies in general. If it were the case that a more authoritative interpreter interprets and criticizes succesfully a "lower" tenet, the interpretation would still be valid. In the present case, though, Śākya mchog ldan claims that Candrakīrti's position as a Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamika leads him to misrepresent the view of *gzhan* stong Madhyamaka, namely by attributing to it the view that mind ultimately exists, while insider proponents of that view reject that claim, in accordance with statements made in the root texts themselves.

As a result of this hermeneutical strategy, Śākya mchog ldan naturally turns towards the commentaries of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu as the authoritative sources for the interpretation of the Five Treatises. The scholastic context within which Śākya-mchog-ldan thinks includes the notion that the Five Treatises were revealed by the Bodhisattva Maitreya to Ārya Asaṅga, who in turn transmitted them directly to his younger brother Vasubandhu, and so forth through Dignāga and the masters of the Yogācāra lineage. Hence the two brothers Asaṅga and Vasubandhu hold, for Śākya

mchog ldan, a status of special authority. Although from the point of view of modern critical scholarship the authorship of Asaṅga, Maitreya and their relationship to Vasubandhu can all be questioned for any of these texts, from the point of view of Śākya mchog ldan this favouring of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu constitutes a valid hermeneutical move.

Moreover, and more fundamentally, as it will be seen in our discussion of Śākya mchog ldan's interpretation of the Madhyamaka view of the Five Treatises, Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, in their commentaries on the Five Treatises, provide the interpretation that allows for the greatest consistency between the five texts, moreover, by allowing a literal reading of these important teachings. Their reading thus provides the richness that a sympathetic reading of the Yogācāra ideas found in the Treatises of Maitreya can provide, particularly with regard to the three treatises whose authority, at least as definitive teachings, is criticized by many Tibetans, the *Sūtrālaṅkāra, Madhyāntavibhāga, and Dharmadharmatāvibhaṅga.*

Most importantly, though, Śākya mchog ldan sees Asaṅga and Vasubandhu as self-consciously defining their scriptural tradition vis-à-vis *rang stong* Madhyamaka and Cittamātra. A whole section of Śākya mchog ldan's statement of his own position actually relates the particular elements of distinction found in the commentaries of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, namely, the "subtle difference between Madhyamaka and Cittamātra", and "How, although they represent Madhyamaka, the Five Treatises do

not reflect the view of *rang-stong* Madhyamaka."[177] This point is particularly important in establishing that, although Śākya mchog ldan's interpretation might be unique in Tibetan circles, the interpretation he is defending can be shown to have been the initial intent of the author of the Five Treatises. He has to be able to show that the Five Treatises originally were meant to be different yet compatible with the Madhyamaka treatises of Nāgārjuna and the part of the Prajñāpāramitā literature those treatises were explaining.

2. Stressing passages against reification of mind in the Five Treatises and their commentaries.

The second main strategy behind Śākya mchog ldan's interpretation is primarily exegetical; it consists in attempting to undermine the widely accepted view that some of the Five Treatises defend the Mind Only tenet and, in particular, the doctrine that mind or consciousness (*citta/vijñāna,* Tib., *sems/rnam par shes pa)* ultimately or truly exists.[178] Śākya mchog ldan vindicates this point again and again through the BCN by quoting a few selected passages from the Five Treatises which contradict what he deems a stereotypical reading of Maitreya's teachings. The main source for this categorization of the Five Treatises adopted by Tibetan contemporaries of Śākya mchog ldan seems to be Candrakīrti's criticism of Mind Only found in the *Madhyamakāvatāra*, and its statement of the exclusivity of Madhyamaka as a simple negation as the final view of the Mahāyāna. We could also add to that list the criticism of Mind Only found in Bhavya's *Madhyamakahṛdaya/Tarkajvāla,* and the criticism of Mind Only, from the

[177] Ibid., 16.
[178] In this he agrees with Dol po pa, who makes this point again and again in *Ri chos nges don rgya mtsho*.

ultimate perspective, developed by Śantarakṣita in his *Madhyamakālaṇkāra*. Since the Five Treatises clearly do not follow the Madhyamaka method set forth by Candrakīrti, since they defend theories such as that of the three natures and *ālayavijñāna*, they match the characteristics of Mind Only attacked by Candrakīrti in Madhyamakāvatāra 6, 45-97. We must also mention the criticism of a really existing mind found in *Bodhicāryāvatāra* 9, 15-29, another foundational text for Tibetan *thal gyur ba* Madhyamaka and Tibetan Buddhism in general.

Śākya mchog ldan reminds his opponents of a few passages–one from every one of the three treatises deemed to reflect the Mind Only position–that can hardly be interpreted as compatible with the view of a truly existing mind[179]; hence, we must conclude, Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, by interpreting these passages, show that the Five Treatises must be Madhyamaka and not Cittamātra, or at least that they do not defend the real existence of mind. Here it is better to quote at length from the *Byams chos lnga'i nges don rab gsal*:

> Asaṅga and Vasubandhu do not explain the three treatises and the *Uttaratantra* as Mind Only. As the *Sūtrālāṅkāra* says,
>
> > What appears there is truly Mind Only / Hence *dharmadhātu*, devoid of the essence of duality / Will be realized as direct perception / Since mind understands it as not being different from mind / even mind is realized

[179] Śākya mchog ldan's opponents choose to read these passages not as ontological statements, but as an experiential process of insight into emptiness; as we will see below, Śākya mchog ldan uses the same process vis-à-vis other parts of Yogācāra such as buddha nature.

> as not existing / Intelligent ones understand that neither exist / Hence those without both rest in dharmadhātu /

The *Madhyāntavibhāga* says,

> Relying on apprehension/, non apprehension is produced / Relying on non apprehension, non apprehension is produced.[180]

The *Dharmadharmatāvibhaṅga* says,

> Thus consciousness only becomes apprehended because of an apprehension. From contemplating consciousness-only, all objects are non-apprehended. From non-apprehension of all objects, consciousness only is not apprehended.[181]

The commentaries on these texts explain these points in just the same way. Therefore, the definitive view of these three treatises (*Sūtrālaṅkāra*, *Madhyāntavibhāga*, *Dharmadharmatāvibhaṅga*), while explained as transcending

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[180] *Madhyāntavibhāga,* I, 7, "upalabdhiṃ samāśritya nopalabdhiḥ prajāyate / nopalabdhiṃ samāśritya nopalabdhiḥ prajāyate". Vasubandhu's *Bhāṣya* on the verse goes, "vijñaptimātropa(la?)bdhiṃ nikṣiptyārtha'nupalabdhirjāyate / arthā'nupalabdhiṃ nikṣiptya vijñaptimātratāsyā'pyanupalabdhirjāyate / evamasallakṣanaṃ grāhyagrahakayoḥ praviśati / (Pandeya 20) Tib. (D. sems tsam BI, 5), "rnam par rig pa tsam du dmigs pa la brten nas don mi dmigs pa skye'o / don mi dmigs pa la brten nas rnam par rig pa tsam yang mi dmigs pa skye ste / de ltar gzung ba dang 'dzin pa dag med pa'i mtshan nyid la 'jug go /

[181] BCN, 17, "chos nyid rnam 'byed du / de ltar dmigs pa las ni rnam par rig tsam du dmigs pa la 'jug go / rnam par rig pa tsam dmigs pa las ni don thams cad mi dmigs pa la 'jug go / don thams cad mi dmigs pa las ni rnam par rig pa tsam mi dmigs pa la 'jug go /"

Mind Only, is not some view other than that of Madhyamaka. For it is said, "There is no fifth [system of] intent of the Buddha."[182]

Śākya mchog ldan does not here define in detail what he considers to be the characteristics of the Cittamātra school; yet it is clear that he assumed that an essential characteristic of the Cittamātrin view is to hold the mind to truly exist. It must be noted that although Śākya mchog ldan's main point here is that Asaṅga and Vasubandhu's commentaries distinguish between the Five Treatises and Cittamātra, and hence that they interpret them as Madhyamaka, Śākya mchog ldan quotes only from the root texts.

3. Śākya mchog ldan's systematic harmonization of the meaning of the Five Treatises

Apart from rejecting the view that the three "intermediate" treatises (according to the order set by the opponent, i.e., the *Sūtrālaṅkāra, Madhyāntavibhāga and Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*) reflect the Mind Only position, Śākya mchog ldan needs to qualify the interpretation of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* and the *Ratnagotravibhāga* so as to

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[182] BCN 17, "des de dag der bkral ba ma yin te / mdo sde'i rgyan las / der snang sems tsam la ni yang dag nas / de nas chos dbyings gnyis kyi mtshan nyid dang / bral ba mngon sum nyid du rtogs par 'gyur / sems las gzhan med par ni blos rig nas / de nas sems kyang med pa nyid du rtogs / blo dang ldan pas gnyis po med rig nas / de mi ldan pa'i chos kyi dbyings la gnas / dbus mtha' las / dmigs pa la ni brten nas su / mi dmigs pa ni rab tu skye / mi dmigs pa la brten nas su / mi dmigs pa ni rab tu skye / zhes dang / chos nyid rnam 'byed du / de ltar dmigs pa las ni rnam par rig tsam du dmigs pa la 'jug go / rnam par rig pa tsam dmigs pa las ni don thams cad mi dmigs pa la 'jug go / don thams cad mi dmigs pa las ni rnam par rig pa tsam mi dmigs pa la 'jug go /ces gsungs pa'i sgra ji bzhin pa de nyid las ji ltar gsal ba de bzhin du / de dag gi 'grel pa na yang de kho na ltar yod pa'i phyir ro /de'i phyir gzhung de gsum gyi nges don gyi lta ba sems tsam las brgal bar bshad pa na dbu ma las gzhan du yod pa ma yin te / ji skad du / thub pa'i dgongs pa lnga pa med / ces 'byung ba'i phyir ro /"

account for the commonality of these two texts with the three others while also preserving their distinctness. He therefore develops a systematic theory of harmonization of the Five Treatises where all differences between texts are explained by hermeneutical principles so as to make overall consistency possible.

a) Interpretation of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*

The first of the Five Treatises, the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, has the most complex status. At first it may seem as if Śākya mchog ldan is making contradictory statements regarding the status of that text. Some passages stress the unity of thought of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* and the *Madhyāntavibhāga*–and thus of the remaining four treatises. For example, Śākya mchog ldan writes,

> First, the final and literal meaning of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* was explained by the Lord himself to correspond to that of the *Madhyāntavibhāga.* When he says, "Not empty, not non-empty, thus is everything explained [to be]", he definitely explains the intent of the *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras – explaining all phenomenas as empty – as the very intent of the *Madhyāntavibhāga*. Thus, if the first (the meaning of the *Prajñāpāramitā)* is established there (in the *Madhyāntavibhāga*), the intent of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* is also established in that text. Hence, since the Lord Maitreya explained those texts as being Madhyamaka treatises, claiming that they do not qualify as Madhyamaka treatises, while accepting that

other texts do, implies extremely absurd consequences, for they are the same on this respect. [183]

Nor is the intent of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* that [of essencelessness], because in the root stanzas of the *Ālaṅkāra,* explanations in the style of self-emptiness are not found at all. The way Vasubandhu, Dignāga and others explain, "...because form, etc., are empty," is that the form of imputed is empty of the form of the constructed.[184]

"Even in the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, the essence of *dharmatā* is not explained as self-emptiness; as it says, "in the unperfected and the perfected...", meaning that in everything from form to consciousness there are the distinctions of the constructed, the imputed and *dharmatā*; and when, in one scripture, a distinction is made with regard to those categories, then it follows that that scripture needs to explain the form, etc. of *dharmatā* as not being empty of its own essence."[185]

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[183] BCN., 5. "dang po ni / mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan gyi nges don mthar thug pa ni dbus mtha' nas byung ba dang mthun par rje btsun nyid kyis bshad pa yin te / 'di skad du / stong pa ma yin mi stong min / de lta bas na thams cad bshad / ces sher phyin gyi mdor chos thams cad stong par bshad pa'i dgongs pa dbus mtha' nas 'byung ba de nyid du nges par bshad la / de der sgrub pa na rgyan gyi dgongs pa yang der 'grub pa'i phyir dang / rje btsun byams pas dbu ma'i bstan bcos su bshad pas dbu ma'i bstan bcos su mi rung na dbu ma'i dbu ma'i bstan bcos su khas 'che ba gzhan la yang der mtshungs pas ha cang thal ba'i phyir /"

[184] BCN., 7, "mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan gyi dgongs pa yang der mi gnas te / rgyan gyi rtsa ba na rang stong gi 'chad tshul 'ga' yang ma dmigs pa'i phyir dang / ji skad du / gzugs la sogs pa stong pa'i phyir / zhes pa lta bu'i 'chad tshul ni rnam brtags kyi gzugs de kun brtags pa'i gzugs kyis stong pa la 'chad par dbyig gnyen zhabs dang / phyogs kyi glang po sogs kyis bshad pa'i phyir /"

[185] BCN.,7- 8., "mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan du yang chos nyid kyi ngo bo rang stong du 'chad pa ma yin te / gzhung der / de ma rdzogs dang rab rdzogs la / zhes gzugs nas rnam mkhyen gyi bar thams cad la / kun brtags pa dang / rnam par btags (brtags) pa dang / chos nyid gsum (gsum) du rnam par phye [8] ba yin zhing / gzhung gang du de dang der phye ba zhig nam byung ba de'i tshe chos nyid kyi gzugs sogs rang gi ngo bos mi stong pa nyid du 'chad dgos pas khyab pa'i phyir /" dGe sge, vol. 80, 6b, reads "*de ma rdzogs dang rab rdzogs dang*", not "*...rab rdzogs la*".

At one point, as mentioned above, Śākya mchog ldan also points out that interpretations of *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* as *rang-stong* are based on the scriptural tradition of Nāgārjuna,[186] which does not apply here as a uniquely valid tradition of interpretation.

Thus, for Śākya mchog ldan, the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* shares the intent of the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, that is, explaining the meaning of the *Prajñāpāramitā*, and in particular of those passages expressing the form of negation dear to *gzhan stong-pas* and identical in form to that of *Madhyāntavibhāga* 1,2. Moreover, the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* is expressedly stated not to represent the approach of *rang-stong* Madhyamaka, that of essencelessness. Despite these bold statements by Śākya mchog ldan, we can sense a certain degree of difficulty on his behalf when the time comes to provide scriptural justification for this claim. For example, when defending the view that the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* (and the *Uttaratantra*) represent neither the Mind Only nor the *rang-stong* Madhyamaka view, Śākya mchog ldan provides only a passage from the *Uttaratantra*[187].

That interpretation, however, needs to be nuanced by other passages where Śākya-mchog-ldan states very clearly that he considers the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* to belong to *rang-stong* Madhyamaka. When giving his order of the Five Treatises, Śākya mchog ldan states that the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* "was composed as a commentary on the intent of sūtras establishing the meaning of the sūtras of the middle turning and of

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[186] BCN., 8.
[187] BCN., 18-19

emptiness."[188] In the definition of the subject matter and meaning of the Five Treatises, he explains that, "the exposition of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* is the non-implicative negation free of the grasping to subject and object, and is exposed following the sūtras of the middle turning."[189]

The BCN thus expresses an apparently ambiguous position on the status of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*. Śākya mchog ldan is aware of this and attempts a resolution of this tension, at the same time providing indications of his understanding of the relation between the Middle and the Final Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma:

> First, the exposition of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* is the non-implicative negation free of the grasping to subject and object, and is exposed following the sūtras of the middle turning. This alone does not constitute the definitive meaning, because, although it is ascertained simply as the object of conception, – as it does not go beyond exclusion – it is not suitable as the object of self-aware gnosis and, hence, its final definitive meaning, which is also directly recognized in the *Sūtrālāṅkāra* and the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, is explained in those texts, because the final meaning of the middle turning is [determined] in dependence upon its recognition in the final turning.[190]

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[188] BCN. 11, "mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan ni chos lnga'i thog mar bstan pa yin te / 'khor lo bar pa'i mdo dang / stong pa nyid gtan la 'bebs byed kyi mdo'i dgongs 'grel du mdzad pa'i phyir /"

[189] BCN., 13, "mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan gyi dngos bstan ni gzung 'dzin gnyis kyis stong pa'i med par dgag pa ste 'khor lo bar pa'i mdor dngos su bstan pa de nyid do /"

[190] BCN., 13. "de tsam ni nges pa'i don du mi rung ste / ldog pa gzhan sel gyi cha las ma 'das pas stog pa'i[190] (rtog pa'i) dngos yul kho nar nges kyi / so sor rang gi rig pa'i ye shes kyi spyod yul du mi rung ba'i phyir de bas na de'i nges don mthar thug pa ni mdo sde'i rgyan dang dbus mtha' rnam 'byed du ngos bzung ba gang yin pa de nyid la bya ste / 'khor lo bar pa'i nges don ni 'khor lo tha mar ngos 'dzin pa la rag las pa'i phyir /"

In a word, the meaning of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* is that of the middle turning, but that itself has ultimately to be determined by relying on the final turning. When considered simply from the point of view of intellectual recognition, the meaning of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* appears to be that of the middle turning; its direct recognition, though, must occur as non-dual self-aware gnosis, and hence be expressed in the manner of *gzhan stong*.

Śākya mchog ldan is aware of the ambivalent status the AA obtains in the system he creates. It is perhaps helpful to refer here to a statement made about the AA in his *sPyi don nyer mkho bsdus pa lung chos rgya mtsho*, where he clarifies again the relationship between *niḥsvabhāvavāda* and Yogācāra/other-emptiness readings of that text:

> If one asks, in what kind of Madhyamaka does the intent of the [*Abhisamaya]Ālankāra fit?* One cannot say that it does not belong in Haribhadra's explanation in the style of self-emptiness, nor is it possible to say that it does not belong to the explanation style of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, for the intent of the middle turning is clearly explained in the style of other-emptiness in the UT. Although the way of studying and contemplating of these two Madhyamaka traditions is different, their way of directly apprehending the object of experience of meditation is similar, for they both accept the object of self-cognizing gnosis (*so sor rang gis rig pa'i ye shes*) conventionally.[191]

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[191] *sPyi don nyer mkho bsdus pa lung chos rgya mtsho'i snying po*, p. 172-3, "'o na rgyan gyi dgongs pa dbu ma'i tshul gnyis las gang du gnas she na / slob dpon bzang po'i zhabs kyis rang stong gi 'chad tshul du bkral ba der mi gnas so shes ni brjod par mi nus mod / sku mched gnyis kyis ji ltar bkral ba der yang mi gnas so shes ni brjod par nus pa ma yin te / 'khor lo bar pa'i dgongs pa gzhan stong gi tshul du 'chad pa rgyud bla

Śākya mchog ldan further clarifies his views on this matter in the *Dbu ma'i 'byung tshul*. In that text, he identifies in the first topic of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, the eight direct realizations (*mngon par rtogs pa brgyad*) as reflecting non-dual gnosis–and thus *gzhan stong*–, and the second, the seventy topics explaining the eight realizations, as reflecting the *Prajñāpāramitā* and the view of *rang-stong*.[192] Hence the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* conveys the two approaches to Madhyamaka, with *gzhan stong*, as representing the main topic, being more representative of the fundamental approach of that text.

We can also relate that passage with several statements found in the *Byams chos lnga'i lam gyi rim pa gsal bar byed pa'i bstan bcos rin chen sgrom gyi sgo 'byed (Opening the Door of the Jewel Chest: Treatises Clarifying the Gradual Path of the Five Treatises of Maitreya,* BCL*).* Here, as in the *Lung chos rgya mtsho*, Śākya mchog ldan contrasts the two approaches found in the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* not based on a distinction between direct recognition and intellectual recognition, but by using the distinction between two of the three "wisdoms" (*shes rab rnam pa gsum*):

> In the present treatise, when establishing [the meaning] by means of study and contemplation, one must explain [it] in agreement with the explanation of the proponents of the temporary ultimate--i.e., essencelessness--, for at that time one does not need to directly recognize it as the object of experience of yogic

ma'i bstan bcos las gsal bar bshad pa'i phyir ro / dbu ma'i tshul gnyis po 'di yang thos bsam gyis gtan la 'bebs lugs mi 'dra ba yin gyi / sgom pas nyams su myong bya ngos 'dzin tshul ni 'dra ba yin te / gnyis kas kyang tha snyad du so sor rang gis rig pa'i ye shes kyi myong bya khas len pas so /"

[192] Cf. *Dbu ma'i 'byung tshul*, 225-226, "(...) sbas don gyi mngon par rtogs pa ni / gzung 'dzin dang bral ba'i ye shes kyi cha nas ngos gzung ba yin te / rnal 'byor de dag gi spang bya mi mthun pa'i phyogs ngos 'dzin pa ni / gzung ba dang 'dzin pa'i rnam par rtog pa nyid du grangs nges par bshad cing / de'i 'gal zla yang (...) 'chad byed don bdun cu'i gzhung rnams kyis ni / yum gyi mdo'i dngos bstan ji lta ba bzhin du / chos thams cad rang stong pa nyid du gtan la phab par nges so /"

perception. When directly recognizing the object of the perfect experience of cultivation, one must explain it in agreement with the explanation of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, for it then must directly recognize the object of experience of yogic perception.[193]

What stands out of Śākya mchog ldan's discussion of this topic is that the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, which of all Five Treatises most clearly embodies the *rang-stong* approach to Madhyamaka, ultimately also was composed as a treatise of *gzhan stong* Madhyamaka. Yet by showing how these two approaches can coexist within a single text, Śākya mchog ldan provides us with a systematic theory of how *rang stong* and *gzhan stong* Madhyamaka relate to each other: they are ultimately inseparable. It is in great part that reading of the *rang stong/gzhan stong* distinction that allows him to elaborate a harmonized reading of the Five Treatises and of the Three Turnings.

b) Interpretation of *Ratnagotravibhāga* as other-emptiness (*gzhan stong)*

The interpretation of the *Uttaratantraśāstra* as a scripture propounding the *gzhan stong* view is, at least for Śākya mchog ldan, a less complex business. According to him there is no ambiguity at all on this issue, and it is altogether clear from the root text and commentary that this text follows the approach of *gzhan stong* Madhyamaka. First, for Śākya mchog ldan, "One cannot see the slightest difference in the way these four

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[193] *Byams chos lnga'i lam gyi rim pa gsal bar byed pa'i bstan bcos sgrom gyi sgo 'byed (BCL),* 41, "bstan bcos 'dir thos bsam gyis gtan la phebs pa'i tshe / gnas skabs kyi nges don bgo bo nyid me pa pas bkral ba dang / 'thun (mthun) par bshad dgos pa yin te / de'i tshe na rnal 'byor mngon sum gyi nyams su myong bya ngos 'dzin mi dgos pa'i phyir / goms pas rb tu myong bya ngos 'dzin pa'i tshe na / thogs med mched kyis bkral ba dang 'thun (mthun) par 'chad dgos pa yin ste / de'i tshe na rnal 'byor mngon sum gyi nams su myong bya ngos 'dzin dgos pa'i phyir/"

scriptures, by explaining grasping and clinging as the constructed nature, explain non-dual gnosis as ultimately real suchness."[194] Second, the understanding of *Ratnagotravibhāga* depends on a reading of the three nature theory, for without understanding the arguments showing that the dependent nature is illusory one cannot understand the meaning of *Ratnagotravibhāga*.[195] Third, Śākya mchog ldan, quotes passages that demonstrate definitions of the *tathāgatagarbha* as not being empty of its own essence, in particular as being "pure, blissful, permanent, a self, permanent, unchanging and eternal,"[196] and emphasizes particularly three passages from Asaṅga's commentary that he sees as an explicit defense of *gzhan stong*:

> Asaṅga did not comment on the *Uttaratantra* in the way of self-emptiness, for in the commentary on the line, "the unsurpassable dharma is not empty", he says, "It is utterly seen just as that in which something is absent is empty of that something. Whatever remains in there, is utterly known to be present in there"–This is an unmistaken definition of emptiness.[197]

> As for the manner in which the *Uttaratantra* is of literal meaning, it is not in accordance with that of the proponents of essencelessness because, if one looks

[194] BCN, 6, "gzhung de bzhi kar yang gzung 'dzin gnyis po kun btags su bshad nas gnyis med kyi ye shes de nyid don dam pa'i bden par 'chad pa la ni khyad par gyi tshul ci yang ma dmigs pa'i phyir /"
[195] BCN, 14 ,"mdo sde'i rgyan du gzhan dbang sgyu ma lta bur ston pa'i rigs pa sngon du ma song na rgyud bla nas 'byung ba'i snying po ngos mi zin pa'i phyir /"
[196] BCN, 7, "rgyud bla mar de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po de rang gi ngo bos stong par 'chad pa ma yin te / gzhung der de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po ni gtsang bde rtag bdag dang / rtag brtan g.yung drung du bshad pa'i phyir /"
[197] BCN, 19, "thogs med zhabs kyis rgyud bla rang stong gi tshul du bkral ba ma yin te / bla med chos kyi stong ma yin / zhes pa'i 'grel par / gang na gang med pa de ni des stong par yang dag pa ji lta ba bzhin du yang dag par rjes su mthong ngo / 'di la lhag ma yod pa gang yin pa de ni 'dir yod par yang dag pa ji lta ba bzhin du rab tu shes te / 'di ni stong pa nyid kyi mtshan nyid phyin ci ma log par bstan pa yin no / zhes gsungs pa'i phyir dang /"

at the analysis of statements such as, "It is like a cloud, a dream and a mirage", and at the answers to these queries, it is clear that the intent of the teachings of the middle turning is set in the manner of the emptiness-of-other, and because it says,“That which has the nature of being free from distinctions of elements and emptiness, the unsurpassable dharma, is not made empty by adventitious things whose nature is endowed with distinctions.”

And thus the nature *tathāgatagarbha* is explained not to be empty of its own essence.[198]

Neither is your second argument to that effect founded, for, as Asaṅga commented the intent of the *Uttaratantra* in the manner of the emptiness-of-other, this is made extremely clear in statements of that commentary such "there is nothing to remove from this.[199]

Finally, Śākya mchog ldan settles the issue by remarking that the tradition of interpretation of *Ratnagotravibhāga* stems but from the writings of rNgog Lotsāwa,

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[198] BCN, 7, "rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos kyi nges don tshul ni / ngo bo nyid med par smra ba dag dang mthun pa ma yin pa te / ji skad du / sprin dang rmi lam sgyu ma bzhin / zhes sogs dris lan gyi don la brtags pa na / bka' 'khor lo bar pa'i dgongs pa gzhan stong gi tshul du gtan la 'bebs par gsal ba'i phyir dang / rnam dbyer bcas pa'i mtshan nyid can / blo bur ??(glo bur) dag gis khams stong gi / rnam dbyer med pa'i mtshan nyid can / bla med chos kyis stong ma yin[198] / zhes khams bde bar gshegs pa'i snying po de rang gi ngo bo mi stong par bshad pa'i phyir /"

[199] BCN., p. 9, "yang khyed kyis de der sgrub byed kyi gtan tshigs gnyis pa yang ma grub ste / thogs med zhabs kyis rgyud bla ma'i dgongs pa gzhan stong gi tshul du bkral bar ni / 'di la bsal bya ci yang med / ces sogs kyi 'grel pa na shin (du) tu gsal ba'i phyir /"

whereas the interpretation as *gzhan stong* is found in the scriptures of Maitreya and Asaṅga.[200]

4. **Reclassification of the Mahāyāna sūtras**

In typical scholastic manner, Śākya mchog ldan is not content with redefining the order of the Five Treatises and the doxographical labels usually attributed to them. In order to justify his views he reads his own interpretations backwards, so to speak, over what he considers to be the "content" of the Five Treatises, i.e., the Mahāyāna sūtras taken as a whole, which are reclassified in order to reflect the divisions in subject Śākya mchog ldan sees in the Five Treatises. Although this part of the text is perhaps less crucial to the argument, which can stand by itself independently, it allows for a clear comprehension of the subtle distinctions Śākya mchog ldan makes between the treatises and their subjects. The categories of sūtra he introduces create associations between several sets of Buddhist hermeneutical categories, such as the turnings of the wheel of Dharma, the Tripitaka, the profound (*zab mo)* and expansive (*rgya che ba)* aspects of the path, as well as relating them to actual texts or categories of texts. Śākya mchog ldan first clarifies the aspects of the two last turnings of the wheel of Dharma:

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[200] BCN., 9, "khyed kyis rgyud bla ngo bo nyid med par smra ba'i bstan bcos yin pa'i shes byed du bkod pa'i gtan tshigs dang po ma grub ste / de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po med dgag gi cha nas ngos 'dzin pa rngog lo chen po rjes 'brang dang bcas pa'i bzhed pa yin kyang / ma yin dgag gi cha nas ngos 'dzin pa gzhung de nyid kyi rtsa 'grel na gsal ba'i phyir dang"

Turning	Category of sūtra	Actual sūtras	
Middle turning		Profound sūtras of the UT	Vast sūtras of Abhidharma
Final turning		Ten *tathāgatagarbha* sūtras	100 000 Yogācāra sūtras

Śākya mchog ldan here seems to be creative: the category "sūtras of the UT" seems to be created to match the fact that the RGV stands alone in the Five Treatises as teaching the buddha nature; in a similar way, I have not heard of the "100 000 Yogācāra sūtras" mentioned elsewhere, and am not sure to which texts this term refers. Perhaps, just as he seems to need to create a category for buddha nature sūtras, he needs to invent some sūtras to fill the category of vast Abhidharma of the final turning.

The second model he proposes, based on the Pitaka division of sūtras, is more explicit:

Pitaka	Aspect	Category	Actual text
Sūtra	Profound	Establishment of definitive meaning	*Prajñāpāramitā*
		Direct recognition of the definitive meaning	*Saṃdhinirmocana* and *tathāgatagarbha* sūtras
	expansive		Sūtras explained by the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*
Abhidharma	Very profound		Sūtras explained by the Mahāyānasaṅgraha

	Expansive		Sūtras explained by the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*[201]

I am not aware of such categorizations of sūtras elsewhere in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition; Śākya mchog ldan seems to be interested in showing that the treatises of Maitreya and Asaṅga represent categories of teachings that were originally present in the Buddhist canon.

I would suggest that the most controversial, and hence important, categories presented here are the ones that provide the key to Śākya mchog ldan's particular hermeneutic of the Five Treatises: by showing that the approaches found in the most controversial of the Five Treatises, the AA and RGV, actually correspond to divisions of sūtras already identified, namely the *Prajñāpāramitā* and *tathāgatagarbha* sūtras, Śākya mchog ldan gives legitimacy to his two-fold model of interpretation of the Five Treatises. In addition, by showing that the rest of the sūtra corpus is explained in other parts of the Maitreya-Asaṅga corpus, he gives a strong impression that the works of Maitreya and Asaṅga cover the whole range of approaches found in the Mahāyāna.

4. Summary of the meaning of the Five Treatises

Śākya mchog ldan's interpretation of the Five Treatises can thus be summarized quite simply as follows. All five treatises expound the view of *gzhan stong* Madhyamaka, using the theory of the three natures (which is a Yogācāra/Madhyamaka doctrine and not

[201] These categories are set forth in BCN, 11.

exclusive to Mind Only), as non-dual gnosis, *dharmadhātu*, *tathāgatagarbha* or *dharmatā.* The difference in approach that can be seen between *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* and the other four treatises is based on a difference in method between these texts, where the latter text is concerned primarily with conceptual establishment of the ultimate rather than its direct recognition. But Śākya mchog ldan himself sums up his views very clearly:

> The exposition of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* is the non-implicative negation free of the grasping to subject and object, and is exposed following the sūtras of the middle turning. This alone does not constitute the definitive meaning, because, although it is ascertained simply as the object of conception, – as it does not go beyond exclusion – it is not suitable as the object of self-aware gnosis and, hence, its final definitive meaning, which is also directly recognized in the *Sūtrālāṅkāra* and the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, is explained in those texts, because the final meaning of the middle turning is [determined] in dependence upon its recognition in the final turning. What is it then? It is gnosis devoid of dualistic grasping, and of the aspects of phenomena (*chos)* and nature (*dharmatā),* it is the latter. *As* the *Sūtrālāṅkāra* says, "The essence is other than the mind, yet not a clarity different from mind; it is called suchness,"[203] and the *Madhyāntavibhaṅga* says, "If you explain the definition of emptiness, it is the unreal thing devoid of duality and reality."

[203] Reference is to *Sūtrālāṅkāra*, 13, 20. "mataṃ ca cittaṃ prakr̥tiprabhāsvaraṃ sadā tadāgantukadoṣadūṣitaṃ / *na dharmatācittamr̥te 'nyacetasaḥ prabhāsvaratvaṃ prakr̥tau vi dhīyate* /"

That being so, these three scriptures are not different in the way they recognize the final view, nor in their way of teaching its application. Why? Because in the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, the stages of realization implied in the *Prajñāpāramitā* are explained in the way of direct realization, together with the stages of emptiness as the direct exposition of suchness. In the other two treatises, the final meaning of the Middle turning, recognized according to the Final Turning, together with the topic of the conduct described in many sūtras of the final turning, is explained from the point of view of practice/application.

There is not the slightest difference between the essential definitive meaning of the *Uttaratantra* and that of the three treatises, for the definitive meaning, which is established in the *Sūtrālāṅkāra* and in the *Madhyāntavibhāga* by way of the three natures, is not different from what is explained here [in the *Uttaratantra*], and because if one does not first understand the arguments expounding the dependent nature to be illusory found in the *Sūtrālāṅkāra*, one will not recognize the essential meaning of the *Uttaratantra*. Thus, their method of explanation is different. In those two scriptures (the *Sūtrālāṅkāra* and *Madhyāntavibhāga*), except for the fact that in that is explained as the final meaning, although there is no explanation from the point of view of the qualities of that (final meaning), since in this case there are temporary conditional distinctions made with regard to suchness, suchness is explained with the seven-fold vajra and the way of explanation based on the buddha-gnosis that is the result of purification of the nine veils to be purified on the

path, having postulated suchness, the ground of purification, as the gnosis of the time of the ground.

The definitive meaning taught in the fifth treatise, the *Dharmadharmatāvibhaṅga*, is called *dharmatā.* The recognition of this, which is established in the *Sūtrālāṅkāra* and the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, is exactly the same thing, because the ground of purification is there explained as what is empty of the two kinds of imputations of the recognition of the object of negation. Thus, this is not covered in the first two treatises. Whereas in those two treatises, after establishing the view, the conduct is expounded in the manner of cultivation countless times as the six perfections and the cultivation of the *bodhicitta*, in this one (the *Dharmadharmatāvibhaṅga*) it is expounded exclusively from the point of view of the apprehension of suchness.

In short, when establishing the view of the Five Treatises, whatever exists needs to be explained as *dharmadhātu* and emptiness. That needs to be what we call gnosis empty of dualistic grasping, which is also called the perfected nature.[204]

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[204] BCN, 14-15, "thog mar mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan gyi dngos bstan ni gzung 'dzin gnyis kyis stong pa'i med par dgag pa ste 'khor lo bar pa'i mdor dngos su bstan pa de nyid do / de tsam ni nges pa'i don du mi rung ste / ldog pa gzhan sel gyi cha las ma 'das pas stog pa'i (read: rtog pa'i) dngos yul kho nar nges kyi / so sor rang gi rig pa'i ye shes kyi spyod yul du mi rung ba'i phyir de bas na de'i nges don mthar thug pa ni mdo sde'i rgyan dang dbus mtha' rnam 'byed du ngos bzung ba gang yin pa de nyid la bya ste / 'khor lo bar pa'i nges don ni 'khor lo tha mar ngos 'dzin pa la rag las pa'i phyir / de yang gang zhe na / gzung 'dzin gnyis su med pa'i ye shes shig yin la / de la'ang chos can gyi cha dang / chos nyid kyi cha gnyis las phyi ma kho na ste / mdo sde'i rgyan du / chos nyid sems las gzhan pa sems gzhan ni / 'od gsal ma yin rang bzhin la brjod do / zhes dang / dbu mthar stong pa nyid kyi mtshan nyid 'chad pa na / gnyis dngos med pa'i dngos med pa'i dngos po / zhes gsungs bas so / de lta yin pa'i de'i phyir gzhung de gsum gyis bstan pa'i mthar thug gi lta ba ngos 'dzin tshul la khyad par ci yang yod pa ma yin zhing / spyod pas nyams su len pa'i tshul ston lugs la ni khyad par med pa ma yin te / mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan du ni

5. Analysis and interpretation

As the other interpretations we surveyed, Śākya mchog ldan's interpretation of the Five Treatises makes two main kinds of statements. First, he makes exegetical arguments: 1) the rejection of the interpretation of the AA as representing *niḥsvabhāvavāda* to the exclusion of other-emptiness (a position shared by most *niḥsvabhāvavāda* thinkers), as representing simply the perspective of other-emptiness (the view of Dol po pa); 2) the rejection of the *niḥsvabhāvavāda* reading of the RGV as defined in rNgog Blo ldan shes rab's tradition of interpretation of that text; 3) the rejection of categorizations of Yogācāra sources as defending the real existence of consciousnesss; 4) the rejection of depictions of Yogācāra sources based on Mādhyamika sources.

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shes phyin gyi mdo'i shugs bstan mngon rtogs kyi rim pa de nyid dngos bstan stong nyid kyi rim pa dang sbyar nas nyams su len pa'i tshul gyis bshad la / gzhan gnyis su ni 'khor lo bar pa'i nges don 'khor lo tha mas ngos bzung ba de nyid 'khor lo tha ma'i mdo sde mang po nas 'byung ba'i spyod pa'i phyogs dang sbyar nas nyams su len pa'i tshul gyis bshad pa'i phyir / rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos kyi nges pa'i don rang gi ngo bo ni bstan bcos gsum po de'i nges don gyi ngo bo dang khyad par ci yang yod pa ma yin te / mdo sde'i rgyan dang dbus mtha' gnyis su mtshan nyid gsum gyi sgo nas gtan la phab pa'i nges don de nyid 'dir bshad pa las gzhan ma yin pa'i phyir dang / mdo sde'i rgyan du gzhan dbang sgyu ma lta bur ston pa'i rigs pa sngon du ma song na rgyud bla nas 'byung ba'i snying po ngos mi zin pa'i phyir / de lta na yang 'chad tshul ni mi 'dra ste / gzhung de gnyis su ni de 'dra de nges don mthar thug tu bstan pa ma gtogs / de'i yon tan gyi cha nas bshad pa med la / 'dir ni de nyid la gnas skabs kyi dbye bas rdo rje rnam pa bdun du 'jog pa'i tshul dang / gzhi dus kyi ye shes de nyid sbyang gzhir gzhag nas lam dus su sbyang bya'i dri ma dgu sbyangs pa las 'bras bu sangs rgyas kyi ye shes su gnas 'gyur ba'i tshul gyis bshad pa'i phyir / bstan bcos lnga pa chos dang chos nyid rnam par 'byed pa'i gzhung gis bstan pa'i nges don ni chos nyid ces bya de yin la / de'i ngos 'dzin kyang rgyan dang dbus mthar gtan la phab pa de nyid yin te / sbyang gzhi gzhan dbang gi steng du dgag bya gzung 'dzin kun btags gnyis kyis stong pa'i dngos po la bshad pa'i phyir / de lta na yang gzhung snga ma gnyis dang bzlos[204] pa ma yin te / der ni lta ba gtan la phab nas spyod pa pha rol tu phyin pa drug dang / theg pa chen po'i sems bskyed sogs bskal pa grangs med pa dag tu goms par byed pa'i tshul bstan pa yin la 'dir ni chos nyid rkyang pa yid la byed pa 'i cha nas bstan pa'i phyir ro / mdor na byams pa'i chos 'dir lta ba gtan la 'bebs pa'i tshe / gang yod pa yin na chos kyi dbyings dang stong pa nyid yin dgos la / de yin na gzung 'dzin gnyis kyis stong pa'i ye shes bya ba yongs grub kyi ming can de yin dgos so /"

Second, he makes hermeneutical arguments that pertain to the definition of interpretive categories themselves. For example, he criticizes the view that self-emptiness and other-emptiness should be mutually exclusive, or that the latter represents the Mind Only tenet. He also makes claims regarding the definition of interpretive categories such as tenets, for example by claiming that Alīkākāra-Yogācāra is part of Madhyamaka. Those arguments are hermeneutical more than simply exegetical: they go beyond discussions of the application of rules of interpretation to a particular text to reflect on the rules themselves.

Third, his hermeneutical contribution is even more evident at places where he simply creates hermeneutical categories such as establishment (*gtan la phebs pa*) and direct recognition (*ngos 'dzin).* He does not invent those terms, but he is innovative in employing them as categories to be used for the interpretation of scripture. It is this hermeneutical innovation that allows him to accept all Five Treatises as definitive, yet still recognizing that they present a diversity of views but not criticizing the view of *niḥsvabhāvavāda* as provisional, thus formulating a unique position that is very successful in synthesizing the doctrines found in the Five Treatises into a consistent system.

It appears clearly from his discussion of the Five Treatises that he refuses to read the differences between doctrines found in those texts as representing conflicting philosophical views. Not only that, he does not present his own disagreement with other interpreters as being rooted in conflicting philosophical views. Although he does formulate a scathing critique of the *niḥsvabhāvavāda* reading of the Five Treatises–a reading which disparages them by labeling parts of the collection as provisional–, he

nowhere criticizes the view of *niḥsvabhāvavāda* in itself. Rather, he criticizes a misapplication of that view as a standard used to evaluate other doctrines that do not share its approach. His rebuttal of *niḥsvabhāvavāda* arguments for the classification of some of the Five Treatises as being Mind Only scriptures is most revealing: the hermeneutical nature of his point is most clear in his criticism of his opponents, not only for using unsympathetic sources (e.g. Candrakīrti on Yogācāra sources), but also from misreading statements made on buddha nature as being made in the same context as statements on the emptiness of phenomena. By taking what Śākya mchog ldan judges to be statements made in the context of a meditative approach to emptiness as ontological statements, *niḥsvabhāvavādin* interpreters of the Five Treatises are conflating two hermeneutical contexts by privileging one (rational analysis) over the other (meditative cultivation) and portraying it as universal. This mixing up of the perspectives of rational analysis and meditative absorption, for Śākya mchog ldan, is the cause for completely misunderstanding the Five Treatises and, hence, the whole of Mahāyāna.

Although in the BCN his arguments mostly target *niḥsvabhāvavāda* thinkers, we can read them as aiming at some *gzhan stong pas* as well. At the end of the text, he denounces the fault of denigrating the *niḥsvabhāvavāda* teaching as the fault of rejecting dharma:

> [...] depreciators of the proponents of self-emptiness Madhyamaka entail, not only the fault of rejecting the teachings, but also of despising the view of other-emptiness; as it is said, "mind's fault has the nature of poison." As it is also said,

"Where is liberation for one whose mind dislikes the teachings?" That is the fault that they incur.[205]

Thus, Śākya mchog ldan's criticism attacks all hermeneutical systems that do not allow for a positive reading of all the teachings of the Mahāyāna that deserve it.

The main thrust of his solution to the tension between *niḥsvabhāvavāda* and Yogācāra elements found in the Five Treatises, the recourse to the different functions of establishment and direct recognition as explaining diverging doctrinal approaches, seems to suggest that he is shifting the debate on soteriological method as opposed to philosophy. Such a reading of his argument, though, quite misses the point. Śākya mchog ldan nowhere claims that, as a practice, meditation is more important than study and contemplation; on the contrary, he presents them as mutually dependent. In fact one would be hard put to find any Tibetan Buddhist thinker to defend the claim that either study and contemplation or meditation are not necessary. The main point Śākya mchog ldan is making regarding the use of those categories is that neither rational establishment nor direct recognition (which we have seen equated with study and contemplation and meditation) should be used by interpreters as an exclusive, privileged perspective for the interpretation of doctrines. Just as these parts of the Buddhist path are fully necessary and mutually dependent, the teachings that pertain to them are necessary and mutually dependent and, most importantly, should be

[205] BCN, 20, "de ltar bshad pas grub pa'i don ni / rang stong gi dbu ma smra ba la skur pa 'debs pa po de dag ni / ji skad du / yid kyi nyes pa rang bzhin gdug pa ste / zhes pa'i skabs nas bstan pa'i chos spong gi nyes pa dang bcas pa kho nar ma zad / gzhan stong gi lta ba la smod par byed pa de dag kyang ni ji skad du / gang zhig yid ni chos la sdang ba dal (de la) thar pa ga la yod / ces pa'i kha na ma tho ba dang bcas pa'o /"

interpreted according to their own parameters, and not based on the pre-identification of a privileged perspective, whether that should be niḥsvabhāvavāda or other-emptiness.

Finally, his discussion of the Five Treatises is particularly informative insofar as it does not only show his own unique perspective but, by contrast, it reveals much about other interpretations as well. Both the *niḥsvabhāvavāda* and *gzhan stong* hermeneutics focused on rational analysis of ontological views as the preferred perspective by which doctrines are interpreted. Thus Tibetan Madhyamaka interpretations of the Five Treatises, especially in their inerpretation of the MSA, MV and DDV as Mind Only texts, are the result not only of a philosophical preference for the negative view of emptiness, but also of a hermeneutical preference for the perspective associated with that view, critical analysis, as a privileged standpoint for the evaluation of doctrines. What Śākya mchog ldan is criticizing is primarily unsound principles of interpretation–the decision to take statements out of context due to one's preferred standpoint. It is first of all the decision that statements made in the context of meditation are not as reliable as those made in the context of rational analysis that explains the most part of disagreements on the Five Treatises and, hence, of the Mahāyāna in general. The fact that he rejects such a hermeneutical method, as well as his own inclusive hermeneutics, shows by contrast the decisions that result from the *niḥsvabhāvavāda* bias of most Tibetans. With this understanding of Śākya mchog ldan's approach, we have to realize that we cannot assume that the *niḥsvabhāvavāda* hermeneutic used by a majority of Tibetan Buddhist thinkers is the only way to interpret doctrine; on the contrary, that method is part of a

particular approach–an approach which is rejected by Śākya mchog ldan as disrespectful to the Mahāyāna teachings.

Chapter 4: The Place of the Five Treatises in the Thought of Śākya mchog ldan

Having described in essence Śākya mchog ldan's interpretation of the Five Treatises and the implications it has both for our understanding of the debates around them and of hermeneutical approaches in general, it is necessary to put the findings we obtained from Śākya mchog ldan's thought in their proper context. In particular, in order to evaluate the reach of the implications of the findings triggered by Śākya mchog ldan's criticism of other interpretations of the Five Treatises, it is necessary at this point to identify: 1) what place that interpretation of the Five Treatises plays in Śākya mchog ldan's thought in general, and 2) where the BCN stands in relation to the rest of Śākya mchog ldan's works. I will argue that Śākya mchog ldan places his interpretation of the Five Treatises at the very center of his Mahāyāna system of interpretation, and that thus his approach on hermeneutics is the central piece of his interpretation of the whole Mahāyāna. Thus, at least from his point of view, the differences between his hermeneutics and that of rival thinkers are some of the most fundamental elements distinguishing their systems.

The present chapter proceeds by showing how Śākya mchog ldan, throughout the works he composed in the latter part of his life (from 1476 until his passing in 1507), consistently used the Five Treatises of Maitreya not only as important scriptures at the basis of Mahāyāna doctrine, but as the most important source on the way to interpret the Mahāyāna itself. In a way, Śākya mchog ldan develops his hermeneutics of the

Mahāyāna by means of the Five Treatises precisely because, for him, defining the hermeneutics of Mahāyāna scripture is the most important teaching of the Five Treatises. The reconciliation of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra, as well as the connection this creates with vajrayāna, is the most important issue to be treated in Tibetan Buddhist doctrine.

The first part of this chapter summarizes and analyzes Śākya mchog ldan's treatment of the Five Treatises throughout his works, especially those he composed in the latter part of his life. The second part shows, by relating his interpretation of the Five Treatises to other aspects of his thought, how those texts form the very basis of his Mahāyāna system, and how the hermeneutical strategy he employs to interpret the Five Treatises allows him to integrate the whole body of Mahāyāna scriptures into a harmonious system.

1. Śākya mchog ldan's Interpretation of the Five Treatises in Works Other than the BCN

Śākya mchog ldan gives an interesting treatment of the Five Treatises in the *Byams chos lnga'i lam rim gsal bar byed pa'i bstan bcos rin chen sgrom gyi sgo 'byed* (BCL), perhaps his second most important commentary on the Five Treatises after the BCN. In this text, which he composed in 1507, the last year of his life, Śākya mchog ldan shows, by taking the Five Treatises as the basis for a full-fledged gradual path (*lam rim*), how seriously he takes these texts, and how, in every detail, he can defend their use as the basis for a full path to enlightenment. Especially after Tsongkhapa composed his masterpiece *Lam rim*

chen mo, whose final view of reality is based on his interpretation of *thal gyur ba* Madhyamaka, the choice of the Five Treatises as forming an alternative basis for a *lam rim*–including at the stages of the final recognition of reality–forms a major part of Śākya mchog ldan's defense of the importance of these scriptures.

The BCL, especially in the way it divides the Buddhist path as corresponding to sub-sections of the Five Treatises, provides us with a wealth of information on Śākya mchog ldan's interpretation of those texts. I cannot, without diverging from the scope and point of this dissertation, present here all the details of Śākya mchog ldan's *lam rim*. Hence I provide here but a summary of elements directly related to the interpretation of the Five Treatises and what they involve for our understanding of Buddhist hermeneutics.

By setting down, in the BCL, the Five Treatises as a path, Śākya mchog ldan explains in detail his understanding that they participate in a single intent, and that the different trends or variations found in the Five only represent an answer to different needs arising on that path. The elaboration of a *lam rim* consists essentially in the attribution of practical function to teachings—i.e., at what stage and for what purpose every taught doctrine is supposed to be used in order to function from a practical soteriological point of view. The very idea of using the *Five Treatises* as constituting a full path to liberation in itself derives from Śākya mchog ldan's claim that they are definitive and complete. That being said, Śākya mchog ldan also recognizes the diversity of views found in the Five Treatises, for he actually creates three gradual paths – one for the

Abhisamayālaṇkāra, one for the three "intermediate" treatises, and one for the *Ratnagotravibhāga.*[206]

We saw in chapter 3 that Śākya mchog ldan used practical categories in order to solve apparent inconsistency between different doctrines, especially by making a distinction between the more or less intellectual function of establishment (*gtan la 'bebs pa*) and the experiential function of direct recognition (*ngos 'dzin*). In the BCL Śākya mchog ldan explains in detail in what way these functions are related and how they can be combined to form a complete Buddhist path.

The first important distinction he develops in this text builds on the distinction we have just mentioned, that between establishment and direct recognition. In the BCL, Śākya mchog ldan ties those two approaches to well established concepts used in Buddhist thought to distinguish between different phases of the Buddhist path, the threefold breakdown of *shes rab (prajñā)*" as the three "insights": insight derived from study (*śrūtamayī-prajñā*, *thos pa las byung ba'i shes rab*), insight derived from contemplation (*cintāmayī-prajñā, bsam pa las byung ba'i shes rab*) and insight derived from cultivation (*bhavanāmayī-prajñā, sgom pa las byung ba'i shes rab*) :

> In the present treatise, when establishing [the meaning] by means of study and contemplation, one must explain [it] in agreement with the explanation of the proponents of the temporary ultimate--i.e., essencelessness--, for at that time

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[206] BCL, 40.

one does not need to directly recognize it as the object of experience of yogic perception. When directly recognizing the object of the perfect experience of cultivation, one must explain it in agreement with the explanation of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, for it then must be directly recognized the object of experience of yogic perception.[207]

This discussion might perhaps constitute a development of the theoretical approach demonstrated in BCN, where Śākya mchog ldan made the distinction between rational establishment (*gtan la 'bebs pa)* and direct apprehension (*ngos `dzin).* The connection of those two sets of concepts is significant insofar as it creates a connection between Śākya mchog ldan's hermeneutic strategy and the very fundamental and accepted categories of the three "acumens". This connection may also be referring to a Tibetan historical distinction between two traditions of interpretation of the RGV and buddha nature, the "analytic" (*thos bsam gyi lugs)* tradition of rNgog bLo ldan shes rab and the "meditation" (*sgom lugs*) tradition of bTsan Kha bo che.[208] We must be careful, though, with such an association, for nowhere does Śākya mchog ldan intimate that he believes either of these two approaches to constitute a tradition or path in itself; for him they are just two trends of interpretation, based on two aspects of the path in general. He never presents them as representing his favored approach, but rather as elements that are present in the Mahāyāna corpus since the beginning, including for example, in the

[207] BCL, 41, "bstan bcos 'dir thos bsam gyis gtan la phebs pa'i tshe / gnas skabs kyi nges don bgo bo nyid me pa pas bkral ba dang / 'thun (mthun) par bshad dgos pa yin te / de'i tshe na rnal 'byor mngon sum gyi nyams su myong bya ngos 'dzin mi dgos pa'i phyir / goms pas rab tu myong bya ngos 'dzin pa'i tshe na / thogs med mched kyis bkral ba dang 'thun (mthun) par 'chad dgos pa yin ste / de'i tshe na rnal 'byor mngon sum gyi nams su myong bya ngos 'dzin dgos pa'i phyir/" This passage is quoted in Brunnhölzl, *Luminous Heart*, 80.
[208] See above, ch. 2.

two main philosophical orientations found in Nāgārjuna's corpus. It may look like one of the goals of his interpretation might be to reconcile those two traditions into a consistent whole; yet given his dissatisfaction with rNgog's analytic interpretation of the buddha nature, which we described in detail in chapter 3, it is rather probably the case that he considers both these approaches, if taken separately, to be incomplete.

In his *History of Madhyamaka,* the *dBu ma'i byung tshul rnam par bshad pa'i gtam yid bzhin lhun po* (BBT), Śākya mchog ldan defines the view of the Five Treatises of Maitreya as Yogācāra. That statement has to be interpreted with care, though given that Śākya mchog ldan defines Yogācāra[210] in a very unique way. For him, Yogācāra, in its form as Alīkākāra, is a form of Madhyamaka or "Great Madhyamaka", that does avoid the two extremes of existence and non existence, but does accept self-aware gnosis (also referred to as *dharmadhātu*) as a synonym for the ultimate. Although the view of Yogācāra is equivalent to *niḥsvabhāvavāda* insofar as it avoids all ontological extremes, it is defined rather as avoiding the extremes of subject-object duality (*gzung 'dzin*) – a typical Yogācāra approach:

> According to the Treatises of Maitreya, since things grasped as object or subject have never existed, the extreme of existence is eliminated. Since those things are not annihilated by means of reasoning or some other cause and condition, the extreme of non existence is eliminated. Even as for what establishes that, if

[210] Śākya mchog ldan makes a distinction between two systems of Yogācāra Sākāravāda and Alīkākāravāda, only the latter of which is in agreement with the view of Madhyamaka. See Komarovski, *Echoes of Empty Luminosity: Reevaluation and Unique Interpretation of Yogācāra and Niḥsvabhāvavāda Madhyamaka by the Fifteenth Century Tibetan Thinker Śākya mchog ldan*, chap. 3. On the dating of that text, which was probably composed in 1501, see *Ibid.,* p. 137, n. 362.

> one holds that what used to exist becomes non existent, that amounts to the extreme of non existence. The worldly opinion that wealth that used to exist, when it is later exhausted, does not exist anymore, amounts to holding both extremes of existence and non existence. The middle of this present tradition is freedom from the two extremes of objective grasping and self-clinging, i.e., self-aware luminosity. As in this tradition, except for the *dharmadhātu*, no other phenonemon is accepted, it is very different from Cittamātra.[211]

Thus Śākya mchog ldan, as in the BCN, defines the general view of the Five Treatises as Madhyamaka, albeit under the specific form of *Alīkākāravāda-Yogācāra.*

In the same text, Śākya mchog ldan uses the distinction between rational analysis and meditative practice we encountered in chapter 3 to distinguish between approaches to the middle way in general. He defines the latter as: "the middle experienced by non-analytic meditation" (*rnam par ma brtags pa sgom pas nyams su myong bya'i dbu ma*). Synonyms of this middle are listed as "the ultimate vajra of bodhicitta (*don dam pa byang chub kyi sems kyi rdo rje*), the element *tathāgatagarbha (khams bde bar gshegs pa'i snying po*), the object of individual self-aware gnosis (*so sor rang rig pa'i ye shes kyi spyod yul*), the object of the wisdom arising from meditation (*sgom pa las byung ba'i shes rab*), the gnosis of *dharmadhātu* (*chos dbyings ye shes*), emptiness endowed with all supreme

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[211] BBT, 213, "Byams pa'i chos las gsungs pa ltar / gzung ba dang / 'dzin pa'i dngos po ni / gdod ma nas yod ma myong ba'i phyir yod mtha' sel / de yang rigs pa yang dag gam rgyu rkyen gzhan gyis med par byas pa ma yin pas na med mtha' sel lo / de'i shes byed kyang / sngar yod pa zhig phyis med par song ba nyid du khas blangs na med pa'i mtha' la gnas pa ste / 'jig rten pas ni sngar nor rdzas yod pa la phyis zad pa'i tshe nor med du khas blangs pas rtag chad gnyis ka'i mtha' la gnas pa'o / lugs 'di'i dbu ma ni / gzung 'dzin gyi mtha' gnyis las grol ba'am rang rig rang gsal ba'o / lugs 'dir chos kyi dbyings las ma gtogs pa'i chos gzhan khas mi len pas na / sems tsam pa dang khyad par shin tu che'o /"

aspects (*rnam pa kun mchog dang ldan pa'i stong pa nyid*)."[212] In the same section, Śākya mchog ldan also proposes a three-tiered division of Madhyamaka that adds the category of "Madhyamaka of the supreme secret mantra" (*gsang sngags bla na med pa'i dbu ma*) and relabels the Great Madhyamaka as "Madhyamaka that propounds the perfected nature as the essence" (*yongs grub ngo bo nyid du smra ba'i tshul can gyi dbu ma).*[213] Śākya mchog ldan then identifies the scriptures associated with this category as the *Treatises of Maitreya* and the commentaries they inspired.[214]

In the BBT, Śākya mchog ldan includes, within the category of Madhyamaka experienced by meditation, not only the Five Treatises, but also the works of Nāgārjuna traditionally included with the *Collection of Hymns* (*bstod tshogs*), especially, the *Byang chub sems 'grel* and *Sems kyi rdo rje la bstod pa*.[215] Śākya mchog ldan also links such an approach with Saraha, whom he portrays as the original founder of Madhyamaka, and who taught what Śākya mchog ldan deems the equivalent of "the natural beginningless luminosity of mind, i.e., the gnosis of *dharmadhātu* at the time of the basis."[216]

In the BBT, Śākya mchog ldan states his general position on the Five Treatises in a way identical to his statement of the BCN, albeit without including the criticism of the order traditionally given to the Five Treatises but following that convention in naming the

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[212] BBT, 214.
[213] BBT, 217
[214] BBT, 217.
[215] BBT, 220; in this Śākya mchog ldan follows Dol po pa.
[216] BBT, 218

texts. As we saw in chapter 3, he labels both the AA and RGV as also representing the Alīkākāra/*gzhan stong* Madhyamaka position.[217]

It is possible that in 1501, when he composed the BBT, Śākya mchog ldan had not yet developed his full-fledged theory of the order and subject of the Five Treatises, that places the AA and RGV as the first two treatises. If that were true it would bring the date of the BCN to between 1501 and 1507. Yet his reference to the accepted order of the Five Treatises may just reflect his acceptance of current conventions and his desire to avoid getting into that debate in an inappropriate setting. Moreover, the fact that he does not criticize elsewhere the order of the Five Treatises is not enough to indicate with certainty that the BCN is later, for he may have just changed his view later about this, or just not mentioned this issue in other texts.

One of the arguments raised by Śākya mchog ldan in the BBT is based solely on soteriological grounds. Labeling the three middle treatises as provisional treatises teaching Cittamātra amounts to rejecting, or at least relegating to a secondary status, a wealth of doctrines related to Buddhist practice:

> If the three middle treatises are Cittamātra treatises, the statement of doctrines explained based on them such as the five paths, the ten grounds and the

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[217] BBT, 225. "la la ni / lnga char yang sems tsam pa nyid du nges / zhes dang / kha cig ni / thams cad dbu mar nges zhes dang / phyi dus 'di na / thog mtha' gnyis dbu ma dang / bar pa gsum sems tsam du nges sam zhes dbyangs gcig tu smra bar byed mod / kho bo cag ni / byams pa'i gzhung thog mtha' gnyis kyang sher phyin gyi mdo'i dgongs pa 'khor lo gsum pas bkral ba de nyid kyi dbu ma bstan bya'i gtso bo nyid du mdzad par gzhung nyid kyi bshad tshul mngon sum gyis grub par khas len to /"

resulting buddha ground would necessarily be depreciated as not applying as such.[218]

It has already been mentioned twice that the *dBu ma'i byung tshul* contains one of Śākya mchog ldan's famous statements about the history of the Five Treatises in Tibet.[219] Śākya mchog ldan gives an account of two main traditions of interpretation of the Five Treatises, the analytical tradition of rNgog lo and the meditative tradition of bTsan kha bo che. Whereas rNgog's tradition is defined as as the interpretation of the Five Treatises as a simple negation, the bTsan tradition interprets their view in positive terms under the synonyms "pure gnosis of the nature, natural clarity, suchness, and tathāgatagarbha." Śākya mchog ldan's unique take on these two models is that he claims that they are not incompatible:

> Thus two recognitions of the changeless perfected nature of the Dharmas of Maitreya arose: the explanation as a simple negation that applies to clinging and grasping and that of originally established non dual wisdom. Yet the *Madhyāntavibhāga* says that they are not incompatible, for it says:
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> > This non substantiality of the subject and phenomena is emptiness. The reality of the non existence of both is the characteristic of empty phenomena.[220]

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[218] BBT, 226, "Byams chos bar pa gsum gyi lta ba sems tsam du gnas na / de nas bshad pa'i lam lnga dang / sa bcu dang / 'bras bu sangs rgyas kyi sa'i rnam bzhag thams cad ji lta ba ma yin par skur pa gdag dgos so /"

[220] BBT, 239, "de dang 'dra bar byams chos pa'i 'gyur med yongs grub kyi ngos 'dzin gnyis byung ste / gzung 'dzin dmigs pa'i med par dgag pa la dang / gdod ma nas grub pa'i gnyis med kyi ye shes la 'chad

This is similar to a point he makes in his commentary on rNgog bLo ldan shes rab's *sPring yig*, the *Spring yig bdud rtsi'i thigs pa'i rnam bshad dpag bsam yongs 'du'i ljong phreng* (henceforth PYS), where he defines the tradition of the Five Treatises as including both the system of study and contemplation and the system of meditation.[221]

He also states that Rang byung rdo rje's tradition of interpreting the DDV in accordance with inner tantra follows the same approach, that is, by accepting non dual gnosis as the direct experience of the reality of emptiness.[222] Since Śākya mchog ldan himself adopts it, this statement constitutes in essence an acknowledgment of Rang byung rdo rje's precedent in setting out that interpretation.

Finally, in the BBT, Śākya mchog ldan makes a statement that highlights an important feature of his thought:

> Later Tibetans say that the direct recognition of the definitive meaning of the later Treatises is none other than emptiness that is empty of subject and objective grasping as separate substances – a greatly mistaken way of recognizing the definitive meaning of those teachings.[223]

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pa'o / de gnyis ka yang mi 'gal bar dbus mtha' las gsungs te / ji skad du / gang zag dang ni chos rnams kyi / dngos po med 'dir stong pa nyid / gnyis dngos med pa'i dngos yod pa / dgnos po stong pa'i mtshan nyid do / "

[221] PYS, 327, "byams chos pa nyid la'ang / thos bsam pa'i lugs ltar bshad pa dang / sgom lugs ltar 'chad pa zhes bya ba'i tha snyad dang / [...]"

[222] BBT, 239.

[223] BBT, 240, "bod phyi mas byams chos phyi ma'i nges don gyi ngos 'dzin / gzung 'dzin rdzas gzhan gyis stong ba'i stong pa nyid las gzhan med do zhes zer ba ni / chos de'i nges don ngos 'dzin tshul la shin tu sgrib par bya'o /"

As we saw in the BCN[224], Śākya mchog ldan believed that the authentic tradition of interpreting the Five Treatises of Maitreya had degenerated due to interpretations developed by later Mādhyamikas, with the consequence that neglecting or disrespecting the teaching of the Five Treatises had become prevalent. In that sense, Śākya mchog ldan sees himself somewhat as a conservative thinker, preserving the real tradition of the Five Treatises.

Śākya mchog ldan's magnum opus on Mahāyāna doctrines in general, the *Shing rta'i srol chen gnyis las 'byung ba'i a chen po'i lugs gnyis rnam par dbye ba / nges don rgya mtsho'i sprin gyi 'brug sgra zab mo* (NDG)[225], together with its auto-commentary, the *bDud rtsi char 'bebs* (DTC, composed in 1489)[226] discuss extensively the relationship between the different philosophical systems and categories of scripture of the Mahāyāna. Although it does not focus on the Five Treatises per se, it does provide us with a few more pieces of information regarding Śākya mchog ldan's interpretation of those texts. A detailed account of the doctrinal subtleties developed by Śākya mchog ldan in this text would take us far beyond the scope of the present study. Yet we can at least mention a few important points made here by Śākya mchog ldan.

First, Śākya mchog ldan takes up a theory which he mentioned later again in the BCN, namely that texts and doctrines need to be classified not only based on their identification of what the definitive meaning is but also based on their interpretation of

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[224] Cf. above, chapter 3.
[225] *Shing rta'i srol chen gnyis las 'byung ba'i a chen po'i lugs gnyis rnam par dbye ba / nges don rgya mtsho'i sprin gyi 'brug sgra zab mo*. In *Two Controversial Mādhyamika Treatises*, 301-318. Bir, India: Yashodhara Publications, 1996.
[226] Nges don rgya mtsho sprin gyi 'brug sgra zab mo'i rgyas 'grel bdud rtsi'i char 'bebs, vol. 2, 471-616; also in Two Controversial Mādhyamika Treatises, 319-499. Bir, India: Yashodhara Publications, 1996;

the nature of the Buddhist path, particularly with regard to the theories of the one-vehicle and of the three-vehicles. In Śākya mchog ldan's own words:

> The final turning of the final definitive meaning includes the divisions of the profound sūtras and the vast Yogācāra scriptures. Although those do not differ as for the definitive meaning, as for the division between the one and the three yānas, the UT, as a Madhyamaka treatise, teaches the first, and the three treatises teach the second, [and hence] are explained by Vasubandhu as Vijñānavāda.[227]

This passage is important as it outlines an important aspect of Śākya mchog ldan's interpretation of the Five Treatises, namely that some elements of doctrine that have nothing to do with ontology, such as the theory of the one vehicle, also contribute in determining a text's status or intent. At the same time, Śākya mchog ldan seems to permit that texts may be in agreement with regard to the definitive meaning of the nature of reality, but disagree on the path that leads to realizing it. Finally, he allows for a plurality of views within a single text, for although the teachings of the three middle treatises are fully definitive from the point of view of their teaching on the nature of reality, they are only provisional in their description of the path.

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[227] NDG, 316-317, " nges don mthar thug 'khor lo tha ma la / zab mo mdo sde'i chos dang rgya che ba / rnal 'byor spyod gzhung rgya mtsho'i dbye bas gnyis / de dag nges pa'i don la khyad med kyang / mthar thug theg pa gcig dang gsum gyi tshul / dang po rgyud blar bkral ba dbu ma'i gzhung / gnyis pa byams pa'i gzhung gsum gyis bstan pa / dbyig gnyen zhabs kyis rnam rig grub mtha' bkral /"

In NDG Śākya mchog ldan also states in a different way the grounds on which he can separate the two main approaches found in the Five Treatises: the circumstances to which a teaching applies:

> The definitive meaning of the three turnings, ascertained as either the seven vajra points or as the clear nature of mind, is the same thing. It is explained as the seven vajra points due to distinctions of circumstances.[228]

We can tie this assertion to Śākya mchog ldan's statement in BCN that the view of the AA and of the other treatises is ultimately the same, albeit with more emphasis on analytical practice. The seven "contexts" (*skabs)*[229] used in the AA apparently are distinctions that apply to rational analysis.

In the short versified text called *sGom chen Ye shes bzang po'i dris lan (*YZD*),* composed 1491, Śākya mchog ldan divides the whole range of Tibetan interpretations of the Mahāyāna under three main categories: 1) selflessness and the means of realizing it; 2) the scriptural tradition of the Madhyamaka of direct recognition (*ngos 'dzin*); and 3) tantra and pith instructions.[230] The second of those, Madhyamaka of direct recognition (which corresponds with what he elsewhere labels as *Alīkākāravāda*) he defines as done "under the influence"of the Prajñāpāramitā as explained through the final turning, of the treatises of Maitreya and of Nāgārjuna's *Collection of Hymns* (verse 5). Here again,

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[228] NDG, 312, "khor lo gsum gyi nges don ji snyed pa / rnam bdun rdo rje'i chos su nges pa dang / sems kyi rang bzhin 'od gsal gcig po nyid / gnas skabs dbye bas rdo rje bdun du bshad."

[229] Tibetans ususally divide the subjects of the AA using the category of seven "moments" (*skabs bdun),* which stand as chapters.

[230] YZD, vol. 14, p. 99, "bdag med pa dang de rtogs pa'i / thabs dang bdag med rtogs pa yi / ngos 'dzin dbu ma'i gzhung lugs dang / rgyud dang man ngag dbye bas gsum /"

Śākya mchog ldan brings the "view of studying and contemplation" and the view of "direct experience" (*nyams myong*) as tools of interpretation of the Mahāyāna corpus in general, including the works of Nāgārjuna:

> [The Madhyamaka of direct recognition] includes the distinctions of both the view of studying and contemplation and the view of ultimate direct experience.
>
> The first follows the three [middle] Treatises of Maitreya, as well as the treatises of Asaṅga and his brother (Vasubandhu). The latter consists of all the followers of the *Abhisamayālaṇkāra*.
>
> Having established [it] through the proof of reasoning of freedom from the extremes, it is known from explaining the wisdom of the three non arisings as the object of experience.[231]

Śākya mchog ldan here makes a distinction, as elsewhere, between the AA and the other treatises. Although it does belong in the category of the final turning/Madhyamaka of meditation, it still focuses on the study and contemplation. Interestingly, he does not mention the RGV as part of this classification.

As in BBT, Śākya mchog ldan states in the YZD that the interpretation of tantric Madhyamaka should be conducted in accordance with the view of the Five Treatises,

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[231] YZD, p. 99, "'di la'ang thos bsam lta ba dang / nyams myong lta ba mtha' gcig dang / gnyis po so sor 'byed pa yi / dbye ba rnam pa gnyis su byung /7. dang po byams chos rnam gsum dang / thogs med mched kyi gzhung ji bzhin / phyi ma mngon rtogs rgyan gzhung gi / rjes 'brang ma lus pa rnams so / de yi shes byed mtha' bral gyi / rigs pas gtan la phab byas nas / skye med gsum gyi shes rnam nyid / nyams su myong byar bshad las shes /"

showing that Śākya mchog ldan uses the Five Treatises, and their essential message of non dual gnosis, as a bridge between Madhyamaka and tantra:

> Second, the direct experience of emptiness explained based on the scriptures of mantra-tantras should be explained in accordance with the scriptures, together with scriptures following the Five Treatises of Maitreya.
>
> Here the emptiness analyzed by reasoning is not explained, for cultivating the vajra-gnosis of emptiness removes the conceptions of subject and object.[232]

The "middle" of tantra is defined as in Yogācāra/Great Madhyamaka, i.e., as emptiness of subject and object grasping–the central topic of the Five Treatises. The philosophical and soteriological importance of the Five Treatises thus touches both on the final meaning of Madhyamaka, on the interpretation of the view of tantra, and on the way of putting them into application.

Adding up those different references to the Five Treatises, it is clear that he placed them in the centre of his Mahāyāna system: the Five Treatises serve as a bridge, not only between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra elements of doctrine, but also between sūtra-Mahāyāna and vajrayāna. Moreover, Śākya mchog ldan consistenly uses the distinction he drew in BCN between the context of rational analysis and the cultivation of non conceptual direct apprehension as a hermeneutic tool—i.e., as a principle of textual

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[232] YZD, p. 101, " gnyis pa sngags kyi rgyud gzhung nas / bshad pa'i nyams myong stong pa nyid / byams chos rjes 'brang dang bcas pa'i / gzhung dang mthun par 'dir bshad bya / 'di la rigs pas dpyad pa yi / stong nyid sgom byar ma bshad de / stong nyid ye shes rdo rje nyid / goms pas gzung 'dzin rtog pa sel /

interpretation—used to arrange together the doctrines of the whole of Mahāyāna, including vajrayāna, and the path to realizing their final view.

2. Elements of Śākya mchog ldan's general interpretation of Mahāyāna Doctrines

1. General classification of the Mahāyāna

Śākya mchog ldan's reorganization of the different parts of the Mahāyāna has already been described extensively by Komarovski[233]; the following is therefore a short summary focusing on elements closely related to his interpretation of the Five Treatises.

We saw that in BCN, Śākya mchog ldan criticizes narrow definitions of Madhyamaka as being limited to *rang-stong* (self-emptiness) or *niḥsvabhāvavāda*. This theme is central to a great part of the works he composed in the latter part of his life, especially starting from 1477, when he started being more interested in developing his interpretation of Great Madhyamaka qua Alīkākāra.[234] The general thrust of his interpretation is that Great Madhyamaka/Alīkākāra is fully compatible with niḥsvabhāvavāda-Madhyamaka,

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[233] See *Echoes of Empty Luminosity: Reevaluation and Unique Interpretation of Yogācāra and Niḥsvabhāvavāda Madhyamaka by the Fifteenth Century Tibetan Thinker Śākya mchog ldan*, especially chapter 2, "Readjusting Rungs of the Ladder."

[234] Kun dga' grol mchog's biography and the catalogue of Shākya mchog ldan's works establish that, except for a text written in 1501, he ceased writing *niḥsvabhāvavāda* after he composed his commentary on the MAV in 1470-1; 1477 is the year in which Shākya mchog ldan composed the NDG, which states his understanding of other emptiness and its defense as a valid form of Madhyamaka. Cf. Komarovski, "Reburying the Treasure-Maintaining the Continuity: Two Texts by Śākya Mchog Ldan on the Buddha-essence," 118.

and that apparent contradictions between those two systems result from faulty interpretations.

First , Śākya mchog ldan applies his inclusive reading of Madhyamaka to the main scriptural sources of that tradition, especially the writings of Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga. Although he does identify Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga as the founders of the two great systems of Madhyamaka—*Niḥsvabhāvavāda*/*rang stong* and Alīkākāra-Yogācāra/great Madhyamaka/*gzhan stong*—, he does not describe their contribution as being exclusively limited to either *Niḥsvabhāvavāda* or Yogācāra. Thus, Śākya mchog ldan considers those two systems of Madhyamaka as being already present in the corpus of Nāgārjuna, represented principally by the collection of reasoning (*rigs tshogs*) and the *Collection of Hymns* (*bstod tshogs*).[235] In terms of primary scriptural sources, Śākya mchog ldan defends the theory that the two orientations of *rang stong* and *gzhan stong* are already present in the Prajñāpāramitā corpus itself.[236]

In addition to opening the frontiers of Madhyamaka in order to include Great Madhyamaka elements, Śākya mchog ldan also somewhat blurs the distinction between Yogācāra (especially Alīkākāra) and Cittamātra (or *Satyākāra)*, so that the latter is on one hand classified in a sense as a lower doctrine, yet does not stand as a full-fledged independent system. Komarovski thus summarizes Śākya mchog ldan's interpretation of the relationship between Cittamātra and Madhyamaka:

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[235] See for example NDG, 308, " chos kun spros dang bral ba'i rigs pa la / ma rmongs mkhas pa rnams la sems kyi dbyings / don dam sems kyi rdo rjer 'chad pa dang / klu sgrub zhabs kyi 'chad tshul gnyis pa yin /"

[236] NDG, 309, "'phags mchog rnam gnyis sher phyin mdo yi lugs / rang gzhan stong pa'i 'chad tshul mi mthun kyang / 'khor lo tha ma'i nges don 'di yin zhes / ston la khyad par med de 'dir 'chad do";

> Firstly, Cittamātra and Alīkākāra tenets are taught by the same authors in the same texts, and even the same passages. Secondly, those authors treat only the latter system as their own final view that transcends the Mind Only view of Cittamātra, and do not posit any middle, i.e., Madhyamaka view higher than that. Thirdly, they do not discard the Mind Only view as useless, but use it as a step towards realization of their final Madhyamaka view.[237]

In general, Śākya mchog ldan makes great efforts to include as many as possible Indian thinkers in the Madhyamaka camp, even those who are most often considered as proponents of Mind Only.[238]

With regards to the categories of self-emptiness and other-emptiness (*rang stong* and *gzhan stong)*, which seem to have become commonly used terms by Śākya mchog ldan's period, his approach is consistent with his general treatment of Madhyamaka and Mahāyāna in general. On one hand, Śākya mchog ldan rejects the assumption that those two terms are mutually exclusive, and thus does not fit into either category (even though some doxographers tried to label him as a *gzhan stong pa*).[239] On the other hand, he does make significant contributions to the defense of *gzhan stong* as being valid and well grounded in Buddhist scripture.[240]

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[237] Komarovski, *Echoes of Empty Luminosity: Reevaluation and Unique Interpretation of Yogācāra and Niḥsvabhāvavāda Madhyamaka by the Fifteenth Century Tibetan Thinker Śākya mchog ldan*, 198.
[238] See Ibid., 203-210.
[239] Ibid., 299-300.
[240] Proponents of *gzhan stong* were aware that Śākya mchog ldan's view of that system did not fully agree with Dol po pa's. See e.g., Tārānātha, gZhang stong snying po, vol. 4, 505-528, Translated in Tāranātha, *The Essence of Other-Emptiness*.) and Mathes: 21 Differences.

Overall, Śākya mchog ldan seems himself not so much as innovating but rather as rescuing the ancient Tibetan tradition of explaining Madhyamaka so as to include all aspects of Mahāyāna doctrine, including Vajrayāna. We commonly find him complaining about how new teachings underestimate the Tibetan tradition and replace it rather with new exaggerated labels such as *thal gyur ba* (Prāsaṅgika). A good example of a typically Śākya mchog ldan-ish statement is found in his commentary on rNgog Blo ldan shes rab *sPring yig,* the *sPring yig gi rnam bshad* (PYS), where he draws a synthesis of scriptures and doctrines intertwined with historical description:

> Here, in Tibet, in ancient designations, people accepted the distinctions of: 1) the fact that study and contemplation place emptiness on the path of inference, and yogis place emptiness on the path of direct perception–in other words, the analytic meditation of pandits and the language of the meditative absorption of the kusala. Again, the followers of the Five Treatises of Maitreya accepted the designations of both explanation following the system of study and contemplation and the system of meditation. Moreover the *zhi byed pa*s and the *Mahāmūdra* adepts accept realizing the meaning of reality by means of oral instructions that do not depend on scripture and reasoning. As for those [scriptures] which accept realization of the meaning of reality without depending on scripture and reasoning arose, one should examine whether they say or not "do not abandon the intentional scriptural tradition of Nāgārjuna." At this time, later Tibetans became extremely caught into analytic meditation, because they appear to be explaining that, "if you have not cut the whole length of the view by means of Nagarjuna's reasoning, that other tradition has become

> blind meditation. Even so, since even for vajrayānists, the systems of realization of the view that does not depend on the scriptures and arguments of Nāgārjuna are said to be especially noble, it is difficult to completely analyze them.[241]

It thus appears, from Śākya mchog ldan's treatment of those issues, that he places the distinction between analytic and non conceptual forms of cultivation at the very center of his Mahāyāna system. Hence it is no surprise that he bases his hermeneutical theory precisely on those items, as well as on the scriptures where they are most clearly taught, the Five Treatises of Maitreya.

2. Śākya mchog ldan's attitude towards the view of *niḥsvabhāvavāda*

As we saw from the BBT, NDG and BCL, Śākya mchog ldan consistently and repeatedly used the categories of study and contemplation and meditation, otherwise identified as establishment and direct recognition, as means of allowing a divergence of views within Madhyamaka. Nevertheless, the way Śākya mchog ldan uses those categories seems to allow room for subtle changes in the way those categories are related. On one hand, Śākya mchog ldan does argue that both the view of study and contemplation of *niḥsvabhāvavāda* and the view of direct recognition or meditation of and the view of direct recognition or meditation of Yogācāra ultimately are fully efficacious in bringing

[241] PYS, 327-8, "bod 'dir sngon gyi brda' rnying pa la thos bsam pas stong nyid rjes dpag gi lam du byed pa dang / rnal 'byor pas stong nyid mngon sum gyi lam du byed pa zhes bya ba'i tha snyad dang / yang paṇḍita'i dpyad sgom dang / ku sa la'i 'jog sgom zhes bya ba'i brda chad dang / byams chos pa nyid la'ang / thos bsam pa'i lugs ltar bshad pa dang / sgom lugs ma ltos par man ngag rkyangs pas gnas lugs kyi don rtogs par bzhed pa dang ste / gnas lugs kyi don rtogs pa lung rigs la mi ltos par bzhed pa dang byung ste / de dag la dgongs can klu sgrub kyi gzhung lugs dor bar mi bya zhes gsungs pa yin nam brtag par bya ste / de'i tshe gangs can pa phyi ma dag gi bsam pa la ni shin tu 'bab par 'gyur te / klu sgrub zhabs kyi rigs pas lta ba'i phu thag ma bcad na lugs gzhan de blun bsgom du song zhes 'chad par snang bas so / de lta mod kyi rdo rje theg pa pa dag la yang klu sgrub zhabs kyi lung rigs la ma ltos pa'i lta ba rtogs lugs ches khyad par du 'phags pa dag gsungs pas na / mtha' gcig tu brtag par dka'o /"

about the full result of buddhahood.[242] At some points, though, he seems to refer to the view of *niḥsvabhāvavāda* in somewhat negative terms. More particularly, he seems to alternate somewhat between two pictures of *niḥsvabhāvavāda* : although under both accounts that view is described as a simple negation, sometimes Śākya mchog ldan seems to recognize that it is capable of transcending all mental elaborations, and sometimes he seems to say that a simple negation can only be conceptual. Let us recall the passage of BCN where he explains the relationship between the AA and the other four of the Five Treatises:

> This alone does not constitute the definitive meaning, because, although it is ascertained merely as the object of conception, – as it does not go beyond exclusion – it is not suitable as the object of self-aware gnosis and, hence, its final definitive meaning, which is also directly recognized in the *Sūtrālāṅkāra* and the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, is explained in those texts, because the final meaning of the middle turning is [determined] in dependence upon its recognition in the final turning.[243]

This passage seems to imply that the emptiness identified in the study and contemplation phase of Madhyamaka analysis is not quite the real thing, as it is "merely the object of conception" and "not the object of self-aware gnosis". How can the emptiness of study and contemplation bring about buddhahood if it cannot be the object of gnosis? And can one become buddha without first realizing direct yogic

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[242] See *Chos tshan brgya dang brgyad pa zhes bya ba'i bstan bcos*, vol.13, 331; Komarovski, *Echoes of Empty Luminosity: Reevaluation and Unique Interpretation of Yogācāra and Niḥsvabhāvavāda Madhyamaka by the Fifteenth Century Tibetan Thinker Śākya mchog ldan*, 283, 289, 386.
[243] BCN, 13.

perception of emptiness, an achievement limited to the view of direct meditation on emptiness and described in the scriptures of Maitreya and of the final turning?

In NDG, he refutes the *niḥsvabhāvavādin* critique of Yogācāra as Mind Only based on the fact that the view of emptiness cannot itself transcend conceptual reification:

> Many people say, 'If the nature of mind is truly established, then one cannot abandon grasping to it.' But since you also explain freedom from elaborations as ultimate, how could you be able to abandon grasping to *that*?[244]

On the other hand, in the same text, he describes the approach of *niḥsvabhāvavāda* as being free from grasping and leading to the realization of the three *kāyas*:

> By resting within the equipoise that is without grasping by means of the reasoning [that establishes] all phenomena as empty of nature, the three *kāyas* are spontaneously accomplished – this is the scriptural tradition of Nāgārjuna.[245]

This tension between two portrayals of the view of niḥsvabhāvavāda / self-emptiness perhaps indicates a real difficulty entailed by choices Śākya mchog ldan made. It seems that when considered from the point of view of Yogācāra, that of non dual gnosis, the *rang stong* view is merely conceptual. When considered in itself, though, it does seem successful in eliminating all conceptual elaborations. What he never advances, though, at least in his later writings, is that the Yogācāra view still holds some degree of grasping. Hence, even though Śākya mchog ldan is careful not to fall into a criticism of

[244] NDG, 312, "sems kyi rang bzhin bden par grub gyur na / der zhen spang mi rung zhes mang po smra / khyod kyang spros bral don dam bden par 'chad / de la zhen pa spang du rung ba ci /"
[245] NDG, 309, "chos kun ngo bos stong pa'i rigs pa yis / 'dzin med ngang la nyam par gzhag byas pas / sku gsum lhun gyis grub pa klu sgrub gzhung /"

niḥsvabhāvavāda, for example like (according to Śākya mchog ldan at least) Dol po pa does, we can discern a subtle tinge of criticism towards *niḥsvabhāvavāda* in the way he defines it.

We must not forget, though, that Śākya mchog ldan, in general, prefers to refer to these two trends of Madhyamaka, not as separate systems, but as different approaches found within the same system, Madhyamaka. Hence in BCN and BCL, he refers to the distinction between study and contemplation vis-à-vis meditation as "contexts" (*skabs*) or "moments" (*tshe*). Hence, he probably favors reading those categories as different steps of the same system, and not as varying systems. In other words, he rejects the idea that these two aspects of Madhyamaka should be isolated from each other. In BCN, as we have seen, Śākya mchog ldan argued that the two approaches of Madhyamaka are mutually interdependent, understanding the freedom from conceptual elaborations constituting a kind of prerequisite to the Yogācāra teaching of non-dual gnosis.[246] In the same text he also says that the names of the two systems of Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga are "useful conventions". Hence, for him, the question of *niḥsvabhāvavāda's* validity in itself is mostly theoretical, for there is no reason to suppose that one should or could practice it independently.

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[246] BCN, 15-16, " dang po ni spros pa'i mtha' thams cad bkag pa'i shul na dbus[246] ma zhes bya ba'i dngos po ci yang lus ba med pa zhig la dbu ma zhes bya ba'i tha snyad btags pa tsam yin te / rang gi ngo bos mi stong pa'i shes bya mi srid pa'i phyir / gnyis pa ni gzung 'dzin gnyis med pa dang / gnyis med kyi ye shes yod pa ste de lta bu'i sgro skur gyi mtha' gnyis bsal ba'i shul na yod pa'i dngos po zhig la ni dbu ma zhes bya la / ming gi rnam grangs de bzhin nyid dang yang dag pa'i mtha la sogs pa rnams so /"

In addition to the distinction between contemplation and meditation, Śākya mchog ldan brings about another distinction based on different moments or steps of the process of implementing the practice of Madhyamaka. In BCN, he says,

> Both of these [proponents i.e., *rang stong* and *gzhan stong*], at the time of eliminating all extreme views in meditative absorption, are not fixated on anything. Yet, although they agree that the fire of gnosis must burn discriminating awareness (*so sor rtogs pa'i ye shes)*, at the time of defending their doctrine in post-meditation, they [differ in that] some accept the existence of non-dual gnosis and some don't. Hence, because of that lack of difference in the way of eliminating elaborations in meditative absorption, one cannot make distinctions between the two views as to whether or not they are able to eliminate the habitual tendency of the obscuration of knowledge.[247]

Although the Alīkākāra-Yogācāra/*gzhan stong* does accept non-dual gnosis in post-meditation, during meditative absorption it does successfully reject all objects of grasping. Thus, Śākya mchog ldan's organization of these categories suggests that, for him, yogic perception of the ultimate, non-dual gnosis, being beyond concepts, can only be experienced during meditative absorption, and though experienced at the time of meditation, cannot be fully approached during study and contemplation. The time of study and contemplation thus seems related to post-meditation, while the time of

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[247] BCN, 19-20, "gnyis kas kyang mnyam gzhag tu lta bas[247] spros pa gcod pa'i tshe mtshan ma gang yang yid la mi byed cing / so sor rtog pa'i shes rab nyid kyang ye shes kyi mes bsreg dgos nyid du bzhed par mtshungs kyang / rjes thob tu rang lugs su grub pa'i mtha' smra ba na / gnyis med kyi ye shes yod par khas len pa dang / de mi len pa'o / de bas na mnyam gzhag [20] tu spros pa gcod tshul la khyad par med pa de'i phyir lugs gnyis ka'i lta ba la shes sgrib kyi bag chags spong nus mi nus kyi khyad par dbye nus pa ma yin no /"

meditation seems to be related to meditative absorption. Although the teachings of *niḥsvabhāvavāda* are unable to fully express non-dual gnosis, the teachings of Yogācāra do not fully apply at the time of contemplation, for they do not explicitly negate all concepts. In Śākya mchog ldan's own words:

> Thus, having sealed self-emptiness, to practice meditation in the manner of the emptiness of other (*gzhan stong)* is the unsurpassed tradition of Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva. Even though accepting the emptiness of other at the time of establishing one's doctrine in post-meditation, absorption in clear awareness within non-fixation on any elaborated characteristic is the unsurpassable tradition of Asaṅga and his brother.[248]

The apparent tension between a negative attitude towards a merely conceptual exclusion and its appreciation as a fully valid means of reaching buddhahood seems to rest, as is the case with the interpretation of the Five Treatises in general, upon Śākya mchog ldan's effort to include different facets of the path into a coherent system, drawing a fine line between different moments of the process of cultivation of non-dual gnosis.

What does it mean, then, to say that each one of these steps can lead to full buddhahood? Does that statement not imply that each can be practiced individually? Considering these elements of Śākya mchog ldan's view, the statement that both forms of Madhyamaka lead to full buddhahood probably refers to the fact that both of them

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[248] BCN, 21, "

fully reject false conceptions at the time of meditation, and that since Yogācāra applies to that meditation, its affirmation of gnosis cannot be taken as reification. Thus, Śākya mchog ldan's alternation between two views of conceptuality and negation fits into his general project of integrating different parts of the Mahāyāna path into a consistent and harmonized continuum of practice.

3. Interpretation of Vajrayāna as tantric Madhyamaka

One of the unique features of Śākya mchog ldan's inclusive understanding of Madhyamaka is that it includes Vajrayāna as being a form of that view. He defended this view consistently in several treatises from the last stage of his career. As we saw above, in YZD and BBT he divides the Mahāyāna into two or three categories; two referring to analytic and non conceptual cultivation, or three when the particularly tantric kind of non conceptual cultivation is counted separately.[249]

In YZD, as mentioned above, he identifies the various traditions of Madhyamaka as that of selflessness, direct recognition, and that of tantra and pith instruction.[250] In the BBT, he divides Madhyamaka under two main categories: Madhyamaka experienced by non analytic cultivation (*rnam par ma brtags pa sgom pas nyams su myong bya'i dbu ma)* and Madhyamaka that severs grasping to imputed characteristics (*rnam par brtags pa mtshan 'dzin gyi sgro 'dogs gcod pa'i dbu ma).*[251]

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[249] See above, p.
[250] YZD, 99.
[251] BBT, 216, "dang po 'di la mtshan gyi rnam grangs don dam pa byang chub sems kyi rdo rje dang / khams bde bar gshegs pa'i snying po dang / so so rang rig pa'i ye shes kyi spyod yul dang / sgom pa las byung ba'i shes rab kyis nyams su myong bya dang / chos kyi dbyings kyi ye shes dang / rnam pa kun gyi mchog dang ldan pa'i stong pa nyid /"

The object of non conceptual cultivation, the second kind of Madhyamaka, can be described as:

> Emptiness that severs imputations of study and contemplation, emptiness that is not found by looking at conventionally imputed objects, emptiness beyond the object of mind, emptiness as a simple negation, emptiness that completely removes the aggregates.[252]

In terms of scriptural sources, Śākya mchog ldan then writes that the Madhyamaka experienced by non analytic cultivation corresponds to the sūtras of the third turning and to tantras; while analytical Madhyamaka deals with the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras of the middle turning. [253]

Hence, for him, the view associated with concepts such as buddha nature, non-dual gnosis, etc., is shared by both Yogācāra and Vajrayāna. Vajrayāna is thus not only included in Madhyamaka in general, but it is presented as being in the same category as the sūtric teachings of the final turning. Overall, Śākya mchog ldan thus presents a two-fold and a three-fold model of classification of Madhyamaka.

This *rapprochement* made between Yogācāra and Vajrayāna is based primarily on the identification of the middle cultivated by these two approaches as the same object, namely non dual gnosis or some synonym. The main difference between the tantric

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[252] BBT, 216, "phyi ma de'i mtshan gyi rnam grangs / thos bsam gyi sgro 'dogs bcad pa'i stong pa nyid dang / tha snyad kyis brtags don btsal bas ma rnyed pa'i stong pa nyid dang / blo yi yul las 'das pa'i stong nyid dang / med par dgag pa'i stong nyid dang / phung po rnam bcad kyi stong pa nyid sogs / "
[253] BBT, 216.

and sūtric approaches to that non-dual gnosis is in the means used to realize it. In YZD, Śākya mchog ldan writes,

> The experience of emptiness explained based on the tantric scriptures of mantra should be explained here in accordance with the Treatises of Maitreya and their followers. In this [system] emptiness that is analyzed by reasons is not explained as an object of meditation, for the conceptions of apprehended and apprehender are removed by meditation on emptiness as vajra gnosis.[254]

As opposed to Yogācāra's approach to gnosis, which uses some degree of rational analysis, the vajrayāna uses direct meditation on it. In addition, the tantric version of the cultivation of non dual gnosis is especially efficient to the skillful means of Vajrayāna, such as empowerments.[255] Thus, whereas tantric Madhyamaka and Yogācāra are the same from the point of view of their object, non dual gnosis, they differ slightly in means, because Yogācāra, in addition to direct cultivation of gnosis, also uses rational analysis, while Vajrayāna uses only direct cultivation of gnosis by means of empowerments, etc.

Thus, the similarity between Yogācāra and Vajrayāna creates a heightened sense of continuity between Madhyamaka in general and Vajrayāna. At the same time, the distance between the rationally produced view of emptiness as freedom from conceptual elaborations is stressed by the fact that it focuses on an object different

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[254] YZD, 101, "gnyis pa sngags kyi rgyud gzhung nas / bshad pa'i nyams myong stong pa nyid / byams chos rjes 'brang dang bcas pa'i / gzhung dang mthun par 'dir bshad bya / 'di la rigs pas dpyad pa yi / stong nyid sgom byar ma bshad de / stong nyid ye shes rdo rje nyid / goms pas gzung 'dzin rtog pa sel /"

[255] More on this in Komarovski, *Echoes of Empty Luminosity: Reevaluation and Unique Interpretation of Yogācāra and Niḥsvabhāvavāda Madhyamaka by the Fifteenth Century Tibetan Thinker Śākya mchog ldan*, 363-365.

from that of Yogācāra and Vajrayāna. The Five Treatises, insofar as they present both the analytic and the non analytic approaches, and hence both the object of *niḥsvabhāvavāda* and that of Yogācāra and Vajrayāna, become the locus for a theory of how emptiness in general and Vajrayāna relate to each other.

4. Śākya mchog ldan on Pramāṇa Theory

Another tribute to the extent of Śākya mchog ldan's contribution to Tibetan Buddhist scholarship is his great contribution to the field of *pramāṇa* (*tshad ma*). Since this aspect of his thought – especially his theory of "conventional *pramāṇa*" – has already been documented in some detail[256], and it is only indirectly related to our present topic, we will here only look at Śākya mchog ldan's contribution to *pramāṇa* insofar as it is related to his general interpretation of Mahāyāna doctrines.

Śākya mchog ldan deals with *pramāṇa* theory by following the same impulse he applies to Mahāyāna in general : inclusiveness and harmonization. For Śākya mchog ldan this takes the form primarily of an integration of *pramāṇa* authors within Madhyamaka in general, and in particular of Yogācāra Madhyamaka. First, he opens the door of Yogācāra-Madhyamaka to the main actors of *pramāṇa* theory in India, such as Dignāga, Dharmakīrti, Prajñākāragupta, Sthiramati, and so forth.[257] In his *Tshad ma'i bstan bcos kyi shin rta'i srol rnams ji ltar 'byung ba'i tshul gtam du bya ba nyin mor byed pa'i snang bas dpyod ldan mtha' dag dga' bar byed pa* (TTS), he interprets the intent of the seven treatises on

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[256] See especially Dreyfus, *Recognizing Reality*, 8, 23, 27; Kuijp, *Contributions to the development of Tibetan Buddhist epistemology*, 1; Tillemans, *Scripture, logic, language*, 2.
[257] TTS, 11.

Valid cognition as being ultimately interpreted as the Yogācāra-Madhyamaka found in the Five Treatises.[258]

Śākya mchog ldan does make one explicit connection between *pramāṇa* theory and his integration of the different aspects of Madhyamaka. As we have seen above, in the BCL, he defines the category of Madhyamaka of direct recognition which, as we have seen, is synonymous with *gzhan stong* and the view of the wisdom of meditation not born from analysis, as the view of direct yogic perception of non dual gnosis, and says that the analytic view of emptiness applies when one does not need such a yogic perception.[259] This statement, made in a text written in the last year of his life, is significant insofar as, by bringing the concept of yogic perception into the debate, introduces *pramāṇa* theory at the very heart of his synthesis of various aspects of Madhyamaka.

Overall, we could say that his treatment of pramāṇa contributes to his project of integration of Mahāyāna primarily by the way he harmonizes his epistemology with his overall ontological position, for example by integrating Yogācāra elements such as the rejection of external objects, found in some passages of Dharmakīrti's works, within Madhyamaka.

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[258] TTS, 92

[259] BCL, 3, "de'i tshe na rnal 'byor mngon sum gyi nyams su myong bya ngos 'dzin mi dgos pa'i phyir / goms pas rb tu myong bya ngos 'dzin pa'i tshe na / thogs med mched kyis bkral ba dang 'thun (mthun) par 'chad dgos pa yin ste / "

5. Interpretation of buddha nature

Śākya mchog ldan talks in detail of buddha nature in several texts, mainly the *Mus rab 'byams pa'i dris lan*, the Sangs *rgyas kyi snying po'i rnam bshad bdo rgyud snying po*, the *rGyud bla ma'i bstan bcos kyi nges don sngon med nyi ma*, as well as in reference to Madhyamaka and Vajrayāna in his more general works.

Śākya mchog ldan's interpretation of the doctrine of buddha nature follows generally his interpretation of RGV: the buddha nature represents the final turning of the wheel of dharma, is of definitive meaning, but should not be interpreted following rNgog's tradition as a simple negation, but rather in the *gzhan stong* style of implicative negation.[260] Hence buddha nature belongs for Śākya mchog ldan with the Madhyamaka scriptures of the third turning, and should be interpreted likewise.

This account is further complicated by the essentially soteriological distinctions pertaining to who possesses the buddha nature and who does not. Here Śākya mchog ldan posits three kinds of buddha nature: impure, impure-pure and very pure.[261] These considerations, though, belong to what we could call internal issues revolving around buddha nature. As for the relation of that doctrine with Mahāyāna and Madhyamaka in general, it follows the general principles explained extensively in chapter 3 and in the present section, which I will not repeat here.

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[260] See above, chapter 3. See also Kano, "rNgog Blo-ldan-shes-rab's Summary of the Ratnagotravibhāga: The First Tibetan Commentary on a Crucial Source for the Buddha-nature Doctrine," 238-239.
[261] See Komarovski, "Reburying the Treasure-Maintaining the Continuity: Two Texts by Śākya Mchog Ldan on the Buddha-essence," 533.

Summary

A survey of Śākya mchog ldan's treatment of the Five Treatises in general, as well as of his interpretation of Mahāyāna as a whole, shows that his interpretation of the Five Treatises is consistent with his general synthesis of the different trends found in the Mahāyāna, and that Śākya mchog ldan considered the issues we encountered in BCN as embodying the most crucial points of Mahāyāna doctrine. Śākya mchog ldan's solution of the tension found in the Five Treatises follows his general approach on the whole Mahāyāna, which can be described as an inclusive interpretation of Madhyamaka allowing various perspectives to coexist consistently, even at the definitive level.

Overall, we can discern one principal trend in Śākya mchog ldan's synthesis of the various trends found in the Mahāyāna: the openness to various practical approaches, such as those of analytic application of a simple negation and direct cultivation of non dual gnosis either through an implicative negation or through the uncommon means of Vajrayāna. It is crucial, to understand Śākya mchog ldan's position, to realize that he does not present a synthesis of views of the same order – especially of ontological views. He does not solve tensions between *niḥsvabhāvavāda* and Yogācāra by appealing to levels of reality or appeal to definitive and provisional meanings. He rather harmonizes those trends by connecting them with particular functions corresponding to different aspects of the Buddhist path of realization of liberating wisdom, i.e., non dual gnosis, and hence as not applying to the same subject matter.

Śākya mchog ldan defends to great lengths a model of interpretation according to which, by being contextualized as belonging to a specific practical function, doctrines

can be in appearance contradictory but are, in actuality and in application, not only fully compatible, but almost necessarily compatible. For example, as we have seen, the possibility of applying only a negative understanding of emptiness as a simple negation, without the accompanying need for direct cultivation of that experience as gnosis free from apprehender and apprehended, is considered mostly as a theoretical possibility, for it is natural that these two aspects of the practical realization of the ultimate should go hand in hand. In the context of the Five Treatises, for example, the two main traditions of interpretation as study and contemplation and as meditation are not only historical traditions, but also aspects of the original intent of the Five Treatises.

Thus, for him, the apparent inconsistencies between different aspects of the Mahāyāna are really only apparent, for it is a mistake to interpret those teachings as rival views of reality. A careful interpretation of these doctrines shows that the teachings differ only insofar as they apply to different practical functions. The grave mistake of interpreters of the Five Treatises who—being "extremely caught in study and contemplation"[262]—do not grasp that point is to base their interpretation solely on the wisdom of study and contemplation. Since the latter focuses on emptiness as an object to be ascertained, it deals essentially with ontological views. According to Śākya mchog ldan, the greatest part of the doctrines of the Five Treatises was just not meant as ontological statements. His opponents' decision to read them as such, based on their own soteriological and practical preferences, prevent them from understanding the real meaning of an

[262] Cf. above, n. 253.

important part of the Mahāyāna, as represented particularly by the Five Treatises of Maitreya. Moreover, during his lifetime, he saw that a majority of thinkers of the Tibetan tradition had come to take for granted the *niḥsvabhāvavāda* hermeneutic model, thus leading to underappreciation of several important Buddhist doctrines.

In a word, Śākya mchog ldan's interpretation of the Five Treatises, which is based on a critique of his rivals' hermeneutical approach, is consistent with his interpretation of the whole Mahāyāna. Thus, it appears that for him the hermeneutical problem at the center of the Five Treatises is not just a trivial issue, but it is the very reason why some people misinterpret great chunks of the vast universe of Mahāyāna doctrine.

Such an inclusive reading of Mahāyāna doctrines can of course only be maintained at a certain price. Śākya mchog ldan's attempt to reorganize the whole Mahāyāna corpus into a consistent whole, despite its attractiveness, originality and subtlety, also necessarily involves some shortcomings. First, his reading goes against notions that are so commonly accepted in Tibet that he risks not being taken seriously as an exegete. The hierarchical arrangement of Buddhist tenets and the long traditions of interpreting scriptures such as the Five Treatises as representing Mind Only cannot easily be rejected, for they are also based not only on traditional interpretations but also on a well-established scriptural basis. Since Tibetans perceive the classification of tenets as being inherited from India, it is likely that many Tibetan thinkers saw Śākya mchog ldan's contribution as too innovative to be convincing. For example, the fact that, following his system, Mind Only texts and authors become virtually non existent, as well as the absence of a clear Indian precedent for his style of interpretation, give the impression that he has not fully succeeded in explaining many aspects of the

Buddhist tradition. Presumably, this factor may have contributed to the fact that Śākya mchog ldan's position gained little open support in comparison to the main thinkers of his time.

From a philosophically more fundamental perspective, Śākya mchog ldan's reading also entails a grave danger: by allowing many views to coexist even at the definitive level, he is at risk of opening the door to a kind of relativism where no criterion is left to evaluate the validity of views of the ultimate. For example, could one not use his interpretive strategy to vindicate a Vedāntin absolutist position? Surely he could reply that his model applies only to the interpretation of recognized Buddhist scriptures, but that then amounts to giving up the idea that Buddhist doctrines can be defended on their own independently of one's adherence to the Buddhist faith. In all fairness, Śākya mchog ldan would probably claim that relativism is avoided by his vindication of *niḥsvabhāvavāda* in the context of rational analysis; yet his acceptance of definitive doctrines in the context of meditative practice does open the door for different doctrines to be accepted even though they do not ultimately stand to reason. Given the importance rational analysis came to occupy in the Tibetan tradition, this factor has also probably been determining in the popularity of Śākya mchog ldan's interpretive system in the generations that followed him.

Conclusion

This dissertation set out to study an aspect of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy that was until now little understood: the rational creation of synthesis between the various elements of Buddhist doctrine. Using the Five Treatises of Maitreya as a case study of Tibetan attempts to reconcile inconsistent doctrines into a consistent system, we set out to reveal the kind of rational procedure that is at work in the organization of doctrines and the explanation of how they fit together. Our study of Tibetan interpretations of the Five Treatises showed that, even though that category arose quite late in the history of Buddhism, Tibetans naturally accepted it as legitimate, starting a tradition of interpreting them as a harmonious whole. Surveying the interpretations thus created showed us that the most popular approach to reconciling the different doctrines found in the Five Treatises was based on ontological theory: both the tradition inspired by rNgog lo and Dol po pa's system of other-emptiness considered the different doctrines found in the Five Treatises as ontological views. The main interpretive strategies developed consisted in identifying the definitive meaning as the most accurate view of reality, and then using exegesis to measure the Five Treatises against that standard. Thus the difference between those views was mostly hermeneutical: although philosophical disagreement about ontological views was somewhat present as a factor in the determination of what the definitive meaning is, it was not directly involved in the reconciliation of the Five Treatises; that was rather done by hermeneutical arguments.

At this point we have explained the details of Śākya mchog ldan's interpretation of the Five Treatises, emphasizing both exegetical arguments and the hermeneutical strategies that supported them. We have discovered in his works a unique and sophisticated set of hermeneutical principles, based on the acceptance of a multiplicity of perspectives as valid approaches to definitive meaning. Thus Śākya mchog ldan was able to accept a multiplicity of seemingly inconsistent views as definitive, for he had reduced the apparent inconsistencies as misreadings based on misunderstanding the context in which they were made: while some statements pertain to the view of reality as emptiness, some pertain to the direct cultivation of that reality in the experience of meditation, which can only be expressed in more positive terms by means of an implicative negation. Śākya mchog ldan then reinterpreted the categories defining not only hermeneutical categories but also sections of the Buddhist canon to reflect those different kinds of teachings and the practices that correspond to them. Thus, without criticizing their view of reality, Śākya mchog ldan rejected both the *niḥsvabhāvavāda* and the *gzhan stong* hermeneutic, leveling against them charges as serious as those of teaching wrong views: underappreciating valid definitive teachings.

Finally, in chapter 4, we demonstrated how, for Śākya mchog ldan, the issues discussed were not limited only to the Five Treatises or to specific points of Yogācāra or Madhyamaka doctrine: since the question of the reconciliation of the different doctrinal trends found in the Five Treatises encompasses the most fundamental aspect of Mahāyāna Buddhism, namely the way to directly cultivate the view of reality established through rational analysis, the way one solves these issues represents the one most important aspect of one's understanding of Mahāyāna as a whole. Moreover,

since we have shown the procedure by which this reconciliation is done to be based primarily on textual hermeneutics, we can conclude that, at least insofar as the limits of this case study reach, textual hermeneutics have been shown as one of the most important and fundamental functions of reason to be used in Tibetan Buddhist philosophy. We have also come to realize that the critical Madhyamaka philosophy we are already so familiar with does not only consist of a system of ontological views: it also involves a particular way of doing hermeneutics, based on identifying ontology as a preferred context for the evaluation of doctrine, and critical rational analysis as the primary hermeneutical procedure. Thus we have revealed something both about the tradition we are very familiar with, *niḥsvabhāvavāda* Madhyamaka, and about the system we are just beginning to understand, the inclusivistic Madhyamaka/Alīkākāra-Yogācāra system of Śākya mchog ldan.

I opened this dissertation with Kamalaśīla's description of the relation between rational analysis, scripture and meditation. Rational analysis, according to him, was to be used to analyze and establish the meaning of scripture to make it fit to be taken as the object of meditation.[263] The first observation we can make is that the Tibetan tradition has certainly taken the process thus described to a high level of complexity. Second, it seems that Tibetans for the most part followed Kamalaśīla's advice, and that they use reason for the most part as a tool for analyzing scripture as the repository of useful theories about reality. Third, debates about the doctrines found in scripture are not only about what is right and wrong, but also about what is worthy of being cultivated,

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[263] Cf. above, Introduction, p. 13.

for what purpose, and about the identification of what doctrines which do not seem to describe reality accurately are for.

Simply put, we can say of the Tibetan tradition that, just as wherever there is scripture there is the need for interpretation, wherever there is analysis of reality we also find scripture. Hence whoever wants to debate the nature of reality must also be prepared to debate how his or her understanding of reality can be read into scripture.

Finally, in addition to what we have learned about the Tibetan tradition, the debates we have analyzed can teach us something about the way in which we approach that tradition. As Maraldo pointed out, it is important to reflect about the hermeneutical strategy we use to interpret the debates found in the Tibetan tradition.[264] The richness of Buddhist philosophical culture is fascinating and very attractive, and it is legitimate and informative to study the philosophical debates that take place in it even if we are not that interested in the religious context in which they arise. In most cases, though, such an approach is extremely risky, for it is likely to ignore dimensions of the debate that are perhaps not directly mentioned in the philosophical arguments, but that nevertheless shape and direct them. As we come to realize that hermeneutics play a most fundamental role in Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, I have thus showed that Buddhist hermeneutics is not just an issue among others treated in Buddhist philosophy, but that it should part of any attempt to understand that tradition.

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[264] Cf. above, p. 33.

Finally, the aspects of Buddhism that made hermeneutics so important for that tradition are mostly not unique to that tradition. We could say that reliance on scriptural interpretation is actually a common feature not only of other Buddhist traditions but also of Asian religious thought in general, if not of religious traditions as a whole. Moreover, since the reliance on authoritative texts is not limited to religious culture, the present research actually participates in the study of cultural traditions generally understood. Thus perhaps the little we have learned here about Buddhist hermeneutics in the context of the Tibetan tradition could serve as first step in understanding the development of all kinds of cultural traditions.

Appendix 1: Translation of the introductory part of the *Byams chos lnga'i nges don rab tu gsal ba* of *Śākya mchog ldan*

1. Preliminary remarks

As we have access to only one version of the BCN, it is not possible to attempt a critical edition of its text. Nevertheless, in order to make easier the use of the translation in conjunction with the original Tibetan, I present the original and the English translation in alternance, following a separation into paragraphs. As the original wood block printed edition of the BCN contains many spelling and printing errors, the translation indicates through footnotes the passages where errors had to be corrected to allow a coherent reading. To facilitate reference and comparison with the original Tibetan, page numbers of the original text are given in brackets, following the English numbering of the pages introduced in the modern edition of the Tibetan text.

The BCN contains a great number of quotations from the Five Treatises and their commentaries. I have identified the source of those in the footnotes, giving when available the Sanskrit and, in the many cases where Śākya mchog ldan quotes very limited parts of scriptural passages, I cite the complete verse or sentence which he is quoting.

As explained in chapter 3, the BCN was written as a summary (*bsdus don)* of the MV. Nevertheless, the introductory section to the text, which details Śākya mchog ldan's interpretation of the definitive meaning of the Five Treatises, almost stands as a treatise in itself. Giving a full account of Śākya mchog ldan's interpretation of the MV would be a considerable task, yet it would probably not provide us with much more information on his hermeneutics of the Five Treatises.

Since the last part of that section, a discussion of the single yāna theory in relation to buddha nature, is not directly relevant to our present concern, i.e., the inconsistency between the views of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra, and since that discussion unnecessarily complicates the discussion without bringing new elements regarding Śākya mchog ldan's hermeneutics, it is not included in the translation.

2. Translation

[1] byams chos lnga'i nges don rab tu gsal ba zhes bya ba'i bstan bcos bzhugs so

Illuminating the Literal Meaning of the Five Dharmas of Maitreya

[2] na mo mai trI nA tha ya /

byams pa'i zhabs kyis bde ba'i lam bzung nas / snying rje'i phyag gis sdug bsngal tsher ma kun / sel mdzad mkhyen pa'i spyan gyis dam pa'i chos / ston mkhas mi pham mgon la phyag 'tshal lo /

Homage to the Protector Maitreya!
Having, with feet of love, treaded the path to bliss
With a compassionate hand you removed all the thorns of suffering
With your wisdom eye you skillfully teach the holy dharma
Protector Maitreya, I pay homage to you!

thog med shing rta'i lam du nges rgyu ba'i / bstan bcos rnam lnga'i nyin byed snang ba yis / brjod bral lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes mchog / theg chen lung brgya'i nges don 'di na gsal /

With the sunlight of the Five Treatises, ascertained as the path of Asaṅga's tradition,
I will here illuminate the definitive meaning of the myriad scriptures of the Mahāyāna,
the undescribable, spontaneously born supreme gnosis.

zhes mchod par brjod pa dang / rtsom par dam bca' ba sngon du btang nas / dbus mtha' rnam par 'byed pa zhes bya ba'i bstan bcos kyi bsdus pa'i don rab tu gsal ba zhes bya ba 'di la gsum ste / rje btsun gyi chos rnam pa lnga'i go rim dang / nges pa'i don gang yin pa dang / de nyid thogs med mched kyis ji ltar bkral ba'i tshul dang / bye brag tu bstan bcos 'di nyid kyi bsdus pa'i don gang yin pa'o /

Having thus completed the preliminaries of homage and promise to compose, there are three topics to be covered in this elucidation of the condensed meaning of the *Madhyantavibhāga*, namely, the proper order of the five teachings of the Lord [Maitreya], their definitive meaning, how this is explained by Asaṅga and his brother, and, specifically, the condensed meaning of that treatise.

dang po la gnyis te / gzhan gyis [3] brtags pa'i mtha' bsal ba / rang gi lugs gzhag pa'o /

1. The right order of the Five Treatises

The first topic has two parts: 1) the rebuttal of opinions posited by others, and 2) the statement of our own position.

dang po ni / bod kyi slob dpon dag na re / mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan ni thog mar gsungs shing / rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos ni tha mar gsungs pa yin te / dang[265] po la mchod brjod dang / tha ma la bsngo ba mdzad pa'i phyir /

[1.1 Rebuttal of others' positions]

First, some Tibetan teachers propound that the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* was composed first, and that the *Uttaratantra* was given last, because the homage is made in the first, and the dedication in the latter.

brjod bya'i don ston tshul yang thog mtha' gnyis ni dbu ma'i bstan bcos dang / bar pa gsum ni sems tsam gyi bstan bcos te / sgrub byed go rim bzhin du / mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan ni 'khor lo bar pa'i dgongs 'grel yin pa dang / 'phags seng gis dbu mar bkral ba'i phyir dang / rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos ni de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po'i ming can spros pa'i mtha' thams cad bkag pa'i med par dgag pa de nyid brjod bya'i gtso bor ston pa'i phyir dang / thogs med zhabs kyis ngo bo nyid med par smra ba'i tshul du bkral ba'i phyir dang / bstan bcos bar pa gsum du ni kun btags bden par med pa dang / gzhan dbang dang yongs grub bden [4] par grub pa'i tshul gsal bar bshad pa'i phyir dang / 'di gsum dbu mar 'grel byed kyi tshad lan su yang ma byung ba'i phyir / zhes gsung ngo /

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[265] MS reads "da".

Even as for the manner of explaining their subject[266], [they claim that] the first and last are Madhyamaka treatises and the three intermediate texts are Mind Only treatises, because of the following reasons: following the order of the treatises, 1) because the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* is a commentary on the intent of the Middle Turning; 2) because it is explained as Madhyamaka by Vimuktisena and Haribhadra; 3) because the *Uttaratantra* primarily develops the topic of the nature of a simple negation rejecting all the elaborated extremes appearing under the name of *tathāgatagarbha*; 4) because Asaṅga himself explained it in the manner of essencelessness; 5) because in the three "intermediate" treatises, the imputed nature is clearly explained as not truly existing, while the dependent and the perfected nature are clearly explained as truly established, and 5) because there is no one at all defending that these three are Madhyamaka.

> 'di mi 'thad pa la gnyis te / rjod byed kyi go rim mi 'thad pa dang / brjod bya'i khyad par mi 'thad pa'o /

There are two problems with this [view]: the order of the treatises is inadequate and the subject distinctions are inadequate.

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[266] Śākya mchog ldan is using the two-fold model of subject (*brjod bya),* literally "what is to be expressed", and the treatise itself (*brjod byed/sgrub byed*), literally "that which expresses" or "that which establishes".

dang po la gnyis te / sgrub byed ma nges pa dang / bsgrub bya la bsal ba yod pa'o /

1.1.1. The order of the texts is inadequate

The first has two parts: the proof is inconclusive and the thesis is rejected by countrary evidence

dang po ni / shes byed de tsam gyis chos lnga'i go rim de ltar yin pa mi 'grub ste / mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan gyi mchod brjod ni / bstan bcos rang gi brjod bya'i gtso bo la mchod phyag mdzad pa yin pas rgyan rang gi thun mong ma yin pa'i mchod brjod yin la / rgyud bla mar 'byung ba'i bsngo ba yang rdo rje'i gnas bdun tshul bzhin bshad pa'i dge ba yul mchog tu bsngo ba yin pas bstan bcos de rang gi thun mong ma yin pa'i phyir /

1.1.1.1 The proof is uncertain

First, these proofs alone do not establish the order of the Five Treatises in the manner stated above. Indeed, since the praise found in the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* pays homage principally to the particular subject of that treatise, it is the *Ālaṅkāra's* particular verse of praise. Again, because the dedication found in the *Uttaratantra* is a dedication to the supreme object in the manner of the Seven conditions of indestructible reality, it is that treatise's individual dedication.

> bsngo ba yin pa'i des na / rgyan gnyis dang rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos te gsum ni theg pa chen po'i mdo so so dang sbyar nas mdo de dang de'i don bde blag tu rtogs pa'i ched du sbyar ba'i bstan bcos yin pas thog mar 'chad rigs la / 'byed rnam pa gnyis ni / bstan bcos de dang de nas 'byung ba'i brjod bya'i lam nyams su len pa'i rim pa ston byed yin pas tha mar rigs pa yin no /

Since it is the [specific] dedication, it makes sense to explain that the two *Alaṅkāra*s and the *Uttaratantra* were given first, because they are treatises composed on the basis of specific sūtras with the aim of understanding these sūtras and their meaning. The two *Vibhaṅgas* belong as the last [treatises], because they are texts explaining these treatises and they have for subject the stages of practice of the path that derives from them.

> gnyis pa la gnyis te / bsgrub bya tshad mas bsal ba dang / sgrub byed 'khrul pa'o /

1.1.1.2 The thesis is rejected by counter evidence

This second point has two parts: the thesis is rejected by a *pramāṇa* and the proof is misleading.

[5] dang po ni bstan bcos lnga po la dbu sems kyi khyad par so so ba sbyar[267] yod pa ma yin te / rje btsun rang gi gzhung dgongs 'grel dang bcas pa nas 'byung ba'i dbu ma der ni byams pa'i chos lnga char gyi dgongs pa nye bar gnas pa yin la / thal rang du grags pa'i dbu ma der ni mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan dang rgyud bla ma'i dgongs pa yang rab tu gnas pa ma yin pa'i phyir ro /

1.1.1.2.1 Rejecting the thesis with a pramāṇa

First, it is not the case that Madhyamaka and Cittamātra are related separately to the Five Treatises, because, while all five Treatises of Maitreya concern the Madhyamaka that is found in the five scriptures together with their commentaries, even the intent of the *Abhisamayālaṅkara* and of the *Uttaratantra* is not fully established within the so-called *Svātantrika* and *Prāsaṅgika* [traditions of] Madhyamaka.

'di sgrub pa la gnyis te / gtan tshigs dang po sgrub pa dang / gnyis pa sgrub pa'o / dang po la gnyis te / lungs gis dang / rigs pas so /

This is proved by two arguments. The first has two parts: by scripture and by logic.

dang po ni / mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan gyi nges don mthar thug pa ni dbus mtha' nas byung ba dang mthun par rje btsun nyid kyis bshad pa yin te / 'di

[267] MS: “byar”

skad du / stong pa ma yin mi stong min / de lta bas na thams cad bshad[268] / ces sher phyin gyi mdor chos thams cad stong par bshad pa'i dgongs pa dbus mtha' nas 'byung ba de nyid du nges par bshad la / de der sgrub pa na rgyan gyi dgongs pa yang der 'grub pa'i phyir dang / rje btsun byams pas dbu ma'i bstan bcos su bshad pas dbu ma'i bstan bcos su mi rung na dbu ma'i[269] bstan bcos su khas 'che ba gzhan la yang der mtshungs pas ha cang thal ba'i phyir /

1.1.1.2.1.1.1 First argument proven by scripture

First, the final literal meaning of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* was explained by the Lord himself to correspond to that of the *Madhyāntavibhāga.* When he says, "Not empty, not non-empty, thus is everything explained [to be]", he definitely explains the intent of the *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras – explaining all phenomena as empty – as the very intent of the *Madhyāntavibhāga.* Thus, if the first (the meaning of the *Prajñāpāramitā)* is established there (in the *Madhyāntavibhāga*), the intent of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* is also established in that text. Now, if the Lord Maitreya's statement of [a text] as being a Madhyamaka treatise does not qualify it as such, the same applies to other texts reputed as being Madhyamaka. This would then entail an absolutely absurd consequence.

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[268] MV 1, 3, "na śunyaṃ nā'pi cā'śunyam tasmāt sarvaṃ vidhīyate" (Tib., sDe dge phi, 1b, "stong pa ma yin mi stong min / de lta bas na thams cad bshad /)

[269] MS has a double "dbu ma'i"

gnyis pa ni / rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos dbu ma'i gzhung du khas blangs pa de nyid kyis gzhung bar pa [6] gsum yang dbu ma'i bstan bcos su 'grub pa yin te / de dang gzhung gsum po'i nges don gtan la 'bebs tshul dang phab pa'i nges don gyi ngos 'dzin lugs la khyad par ci yang yod pa ma yin pa'i phyir te / gzhung de bzhi kar yang gzung 'dzin gnyis po kun btags su bshad nas gnyis med kyi ye shes de nyid don dam pa'i bden par 'chad pa la ni khyad par gyi tshul ci yang ma dmigs pa'i phyir /

1.1.1.2.1.1.2 First argument proven by logic

Second, accepting that the *Uttaratantraśāstra* is a Madhyamaka scripture implies that the three intermediate scriptures are also proved to be Madhyamaka treatises, for there is not the slightest difference in the way these scriptures establish the definitive meaning or in the way they directly recognize that final intended meaning. One cannot see the slightest difference in the way these four scriptures, by explaining grasping and clinging as the constructed nature, explain non-dual gnosis as ultimately real suchness.

gal te ji skad du / slob dpon zla bas / 'di las gzhan na chos 'di ni[270] / ji ltar med pa de bzhin du / zhes bshad pas na byams chos bar pa gsum gyi dgongs pa dbu mar mi gnas so she na / 'o na gang du gnas / sems tsam du'o zhe na / ma yin te / de der mi gnas pa ni mdo sde'i rgyan dang dbus mtha' gnyis ka las gsal ba'i phyir

[270] MAV, 11, 53, "'di las gzhan na chos 'di ni / ji ltar med pa de bzhin du / 'dir 'byung lugs kyang gzhan na ni / med ces mkhas rnams nges par brjod /"

te / rgyan du / de nas sems kyang med pa nyid du rtogs[271] / shes dang / dbus mthar / mi dmigs pa la brten nas su / mi dmigs pa ni rab tu skye[272] / zhes dang / de'i 'grel par / don mi dmigs pa la brten nas rnam par rig pa tsam mi dmigs pa yang skye[273] / zhes bshad pa'i phyir /

"Candrakīrti", one can object, "said, 'If it is other than this…' , and hence the intent of the three intermediate scriptures is not that of Madhyamaka. Where then do they stand? In Cittamātra." It is not so, because that the three middle treatises are not part of Mind Only is made clear in both the *Sūtrālāṅkāra* and the *Madhyāntavibhāga.* The [Sūtra]*Ālaṅkāra* says, "Therefore even the mind is understood not to exist"; the *Madhyāntavibhāga* says, "by relying on non-apprehension, non-apprehension perfectly arises"; and its commentary goes, "by relying on the absence of apprehension of an object, the non-apprehension of mere consciousness also arises."

de las gzhan du dbu ma'i bstan bcos gang yin thams cad 'jug pa rtsa 'grel dang mi 'gal par 'chad dgos na / dbu ma rang rgyud kyi bstan bcos rnams dang / klu grub zhabs kyi byang chub sems 'grel dang / chos dbyings bstod pa sogs dang / zla ba'i zhabs rang kyis mdzad pa'i 'grel chen sgron ma gsal ba sogs kyis ma nges par 'gyur te / dbu ma la 'jug par rang rgyud pa'i lta ba bkag par khyed cag khas

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[271] *Sūtrālaṇkāra*, 6.7. See below, n. 306, where this passage is quoted extensively.
[272] Madhyāntavibhāga, 1.6b, "upalabdhiṃ samāśritya nopalabdhiḥ prajāyate / *nopalabdhiṃ samāśritya nopalabdhiḥ prajāyate* /"
[273] *Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣya*, 1.6b, "arthānupalabdhiṃ niścitya artha-anupalabdhir jāyate / *artha-anupalabdhiṃ niścitya vijñaptimātrasya api anupalabdhir jāyate.* evam asal lakṣaṇaṃgrāhyagrāhakayoḥ praviśati. "

len pa'i phyir dang / byang chub sems 'grel sogs su ni gnyis med kyi ye shes de nyid don dam pa'i bden par bshad pa'i phyir ro /

Otherwise, if we need to explain that every Madhyamaka treatise does not contradict the *Madhyamakāvatāra*, all the treatises of Svātantrika Madhyamaka, Nāgārjuna's *Bodhicittavivarana* and *Dharmadhātustotra*, as well as even Candrakīrti's own *Pradīpadyotana* would become unestablished [as Madhyamaka treatises], because you accept that the Svātantrika view is refuted in the *Madhyamakāvatāra*, and because non-dual gnosis is explained as ultimately real that-ness in the *Bodhicittavivarana*, etc.

gtan tshigs gnyis pa'i [7] sgrub byed bshad pa la gnyis te / lung gi dang / rigs pa'i'o / dang po ni / rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos kyi nges don tshul ni / ngo bo nyid med par smra ba dag dang mthun pa ma yin pa te / ji skad du / sprin dang rmi lam sgyu ma bzhin[274] / zhes sogs dris lan gyi don la brtags pa na / bka' 'khor lo bar pa'i dgongs pa gzhan stong gi tshul du gtan la 'bebs par gsal ba'i phyir dang / rnam dbyer bcas pa'i mtshan nyid can / glo bur[275] dag gis khams stong gi / rnam dbyer med pa'i mtshan nyid can / bla med chos kyis stong ma yin[276] / zhes khams bde bar gshegs pa'i snying po de rang gi ngo bos mi stong par bshad pa'i phyir /

[274] Probably reference to RGV, 61b, "sprin dang rmi lam rgyu bzhin de dang der / shes bya thams cad rnam kun stong pa zhes /"). Śākya mchog ldan might be using a different translation of the RGV than rNgog Blo ldan shes rab, which is included in the *bsTan 'gyur.*
[275] MS reads "blo bur".
[276] UT, 113b.

1.1.1.2.1.2 Second argument

The explanation of the proof of the second argument has two parts: by scriptural demonstration and by logical argument.

1.1.1.2.1.2.1 Proof by scripture

First, as for the manner in which the *Uttaratantra* is of definitive meaning, it is not in accordance with that of the proponents of essencelessness because, as that text says, "It is like a cloud, a dream and a mirage," and thus in the analysis of the meaning of the answer to these queries, it is clear that the intent of the teachings of the middle turning is set in the manner of other-emptiness, and because it says,

> What has the nature of being free from distinctions of elements and emptiness, the unsurpassable dharma, is not made empty by adventitious things whose nature is endowed with distinctions.

And thus the element *tathāgatagarbha* is explained not to be empty of its own essence.

> mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan gyi dgongs pa yang der mi gnas te / rgyan gyi rtsa ba na rang stong gi 'chad tshul 'ga' yang ma dmigs pa'i phyir dang / ji skad du / gzugs la sogs pa stong pa'i phyir[277] / zhes pa lta bu'i 'chad tshul ni rnam brtags kyi gzugs de kun brtags pa'i gzugs kyis stong pa la 'chad par dbyig gnyen zhabs dang / phyogs kyi glang po sogs kyis bshad pa'i phyir /

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[277] *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, 2,3, "'phags pa nyan thos lam la ni / gzugs la sogs pa stong pa'i phyir / stong pa nyid rnam dbyer med pas / dro ba de dag mi dmigs pas /"

Nor is the intent of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* that [of essencelessness], because in the root stanzas of the *Ālaṅkāra* explanations in the style of self-emptiness are not found at all. The way Vasubandhu, Dignāga and others explain, "...because form, etc., are empty," is that the form of the imagined[278] is empty of the form of the imputed.

> gnyis pa ni / rgyud bla mar de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po de rang gi ngo bos stong par 'chad pa ma yin te / gzhung der de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po ni gtsang bde rtag bdag dang / rtag brtan g.yung drung du bshad pa'i phyir /

1.1.1.2.1.2.2 Proof by logic

Second, in the *Uttaratantra* the *tathāgatagarbha* is not explained as empty of its own essence, because in that scripture the *tathāgatagarbha* is presented as clean, blissful, permanent, self, unchanging and eternal.

> mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan du yang chos nyid kyi ngo bo rang stong du 'chad pa ma yin te / gzhung der / de ma rdzogs dang rab rdzogs la [279]/ zhes gzugs nas rnam mkhyen gyi bar thams cad la / kun brtags pa dang / rnam par btags (brtags) pa dang / chos nyid gsum (gsum) du rnam par phye [8] ba yin zhing /

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[278] Here "imagined" (*rnam brtags*) is used as a synonym for the dependent nature (*gzhan dbang*).

[279] *Abhisamayālaṅkāra,* 3, 8. "rūpādau tadanityādau tadapūrirapūrayoḥ / tadasaṃgatve caryāyāḥ prayogaḥ pratiṣeghataḥ / Tib., sDe dge, Shes phyin, ka, 6b,"gzugs sogs de mi rtag sogs dang / de ma rdzogs dang rab rdzogs dang / de la chags pa med nyid la / spyod pa bkag pai sbyor ba dang /"

gzhung gang du de dang der phye ba zhig nam byung ba de'i tshe chos nyid kyi gzugs sogs rang gi ngo bos mi stong pa nyid du 'chad dgos pas khyab pa'i phyir /

Even in the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, the essence of *dharmatā* is not explained as emptiness of self; as it says, "in the unperfected and the perfected...", meaning that in everything from form to consciousness there are the distinctions of the imputed, the dependent (*rnam brtags*) and *dharmatā*; and when, in one scripture, a distinction is made with regard to those categories, then it follows that that scripture needs to explain the form, etc. of *dharmatā* as not being empty of its own essence.

gal te 'o na 'phags pa grol sdes rgyan gyi dgongs pa rang stong smra ba'i tshul du bkral ba dang / thogs med zhabs kyis rgyud bla'i dgongs pa yang der bkral ba ma yin nam zhe na / 'phags pa grol sdes rgyan gyi nges don de ltar bkral ba yin mod / bkral ba de ni klu sgrub zhabs kyi dgongs pa dang mthun zhes 'chad du rung yang rje btsun byams pa'i gzhung gi dgongs par song ba ma yin te / byams chos phyi ma bzhi pos shes phyin gyi mdo'i dgongs pa bkral ba dang ma mthun pa'i phyir / de lta na yang mi 'thad pa ni ma yin te / shes phyin gyi mdo'i dgongs pa dbu mar 'grel ba'i shing rta chen po'i srol gnyis las / gcig ni 'phags grol gyi 'chad tshul de nyid yin pa'i phyir / dper na bstan bcos bzhi brgya pa'i dgongs pa dpal ldan chos skyong zhabs kyis gzhan stong gi tshul du bkral kyang dbu mar ma bkral ba ma yin pa bzhin no /

(*objection)*

Should one object: but didn't Ārya Vimuktisena interpret the intent of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* in the manner of the emptiness of self, and didn't Asaṅga explain thus the intent of the *Uttaratantra*? Although Ārya Vimuktisena did indeed interpret thus the final meaning of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, it must be said that that interpretation is made in conformity to the thought of Nāgārjuna, and does not follow the intent of the scriptures of Ārya Maitreya, because it does not follow the interpretation of the *Prajñāpāramitā* Sūtras found in the four later scriptures of Maitreya. Thus, this is no problem, because of the two great traditions of interpretation of the intent of the Prajñāpāramitā as Madhyamaka, the one adopted by Ārya Vimuktisena is only one. For example, the intent of the *Catuḥśataka* is interpreted by the Glorious Dharmapāla in the manner of the emptiness of other, and it is not the case that it is not interpreted in the way of Madhyamaka.

> rgyud bla'i 'grel par ni gzhan stong gi tshul kho na gsal bar bzhugs kyi rang stong gi 'chad lugs sna gcig kyang bshad pa med do /

In the commentary on the *Uttaratantra*, while only clarification in the style of other-emptiness is found, there is not a single instance of explanation as self-emptiness.

> gnyis pa sgrub byed 'khrul pa la gnyis te / khyab pa 'khrul pa dang / gtan tshigs ma grub pa'o /

1.1.1.2.2. The Proof is misleading

Second, as for the misleading nature of the proof, there are two parts: pervasion is faulty and the proof is unestablished.

> dang po ni / 'khor lo bar pa'i dgongs 'grel yin pa tsam gyis ngo bo byid med pa'i tshul du gnas par khas len na / ji skad du / bstan bcos chen po'i rnam bshad mdzad / ces dang / shes bya nang gi yin pa la[280] / zhes pas skabs nas 'byung ba'i 'grel pa rnams kyis ma nges pa dang / yang 'phags seng gis bkral[281] ba tsam gyis der nges na dbyig gnyen dang / phyogs [9] kyi glang pos bkral ba tsam gyis ni gzhan stong 'chad pa'i bstan bcos su nges par yang rigs la / de lta na ni khyed cag gzhang stong smra ba'i bstan bcos thams cad sems tsam gyi bstan bcos su khas blang pa dang 'gal lo /

First, if you accept that [a treatise] is to be interpreted as advocating essencelessness simply because its intent is that of the middle turning, [the following faults ensue]: Because it is said, “the great treatise was explained”, and "in what is to be known,” the commentaries arising from that section would be unestablished. Moreover, if it is ascertained as such simply based on the interpretation of Haribhadra, as the interpretations of Vasubandhu and Dignāga are also correct in interpreting this treatise as explaining other-emptiness, then that does not agree with your position that all treatises advocating other-emptiness represent the Mind Only position.

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[280] Haribhadra *Abhisamālaṅkāravṛtti,* sDe dge Shes phyin, 78b,

[281] MS : “bral”

> gnyis pa ni / khyed kyis rgyud bla ngo bo nyid med par smra ba'i bstan bcos yin pa'i shes byed du bkod pa'i gtan tshigs dang po ma grub ste / de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po med dgag gi cha nas ngos 'dzin pa rngog lo chen po rjes 'brang dang bcas pa'i bzhed pa yin kyang / ma yin dgag gi cha nas ngos 'dzin pa gzhung de nyid kyi rtsa 'grel na gsal ba'i phyir dang / spyir yang de bzhin nyid kyi ngos 'dzin gnyis med kyi ye shes la 'chad dgos pa ni byams chos rjes 'brang dang bcas pa'i gzhung lugs mtha' dag na gsal ba'i phyir dang / theg pa bla na med pa'i gzhung las kyang snying po'i ngos 'dzin chos dbyings ye shes la 'chad par gsal ba'i phyir ro /

Second, your first argument[282], based on the proof that the *Uttaratantra* is a treatise of essencelessness, is unfounded, because, although the recognition of the *tathāgatagarbha*, from the point of view of a simple negation, is accepted by rNgog Lotsāwa and his followers, that recognition from the point of view of an implicative negation is clarified in that very scripture and its commentary. Furthermore, in general, the definitive scriptural tradition of the Treatises of Maitreya and its followers accepts that the recognition of thusness is to be explained as nondual gnosis. Moreover, even in the scriptures of the unsurpassable vehicle the recognition of the essence is clearly explained as gnosis of the *dharmadhātu*.

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[282] "because the *Uttaratantra* primarily develops the topic of the nature of a simple negation rejecting all the elaborated extremes appearing under the name of *tathāgatagarbha*;"

> yang khyed kyis de der sgrub byed kyi gtan tshigs gnyis pa yang ma grub ste / thogs med zhabs kyis rgyud bla ma'i dgongs pa gzhan stong gi tshul du bkral bar ni / 'di la bsal bya ci yang med[283] / ces sogs kyi 'grel pa na shin (du) tu gsal ba'i phyir /

Neither is your second argument to that effect founded, for, as Asaṅga commented the intent of the *Uttaratantra* in the manner of other-emptiness, this is made extremely clear in statement of that commentary such "there is nothing to remove from this."

> yang khyed kyis bstan bcos bar pa gsum sems tsam gyi gzhung du sgrub pa'i gtan tshigs dang po ma grub ste / gzhung de gsum 'grel pa dang bcas pa na gzhan dbang sgyu ma lta bur ston pa sha stag yod kyi bden grub tu ston pa gcig kyang med pa'i phyir dang / slob dpon zla bas / ji skad du / de phyir gzhan gyi dbang gi ngo bo gang / zhes sogs phyogs snga mar blangs pa der ni gzhan dbang gi ngo bo zhes pa gnyis med kyi ye shes la [10] zer pa yin te / ji skad du / yod dang spros kun yul min rang bzhin yod[284] / ces 'byung ba las gsal ba'i phyir ro /

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[283] *Uttaratantra*, 10, 154 (sde dge, 113b-114A). "De la stong pa nyid kyi tshul du brjod pa de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po gang zhe na / 'di la bsal bya ci yang med / gzhag par bya ba cung zad med / yang dag nyid la yang dag lta / yang dag mthong nas rnam par grol /rnam dbyer bcas pa' i mtshan nyid can / glo bur dag gis khams stong gi / rnam dbyer med pa'i mtshan nyid can / bla med chos kyis stong ma yin /" (114a) Commentary : "'dis ci bstan zhe na / gang gi phyir rang bzhin gyis yongs su dag pa de bzhin gshegs pa'i khams 'di las bsal bar bya kun nas nyon mongs pa'i rgyu mtshan ni 'ga' yang med la / glo bur ba'i dri ma dang bral ba ni 'di'i rang bzhin yin pa'i phyir ro / 'di la rnam par byang ba'i rgyu mtshan can gzhag par bya ba yang cung zad kyang yod pa ma yin te /" Translation in Takasaki, 300-301. (154)

[284] *Madhyamakāvatāra*, 6, 47. "de phyir gzhan gyi dbang gi ngo bo gang / dngos po btags par yod pa'i rgyur 'gyur zhing / phyi rol gzung ba med par 'byung 'gyur la / yod dang spros kun yul min rang bzhin yod /"

Again, your first argument to the effect that the three intermediate treatises were composed as scriptures of the Mind Only is unestablished, for in these three texts and their commentaries, even though there are a few places that teach the dependent nature as similar to an illusion, there is not a single instance of describing it as really existing. Candrakīrti's statement, "Hence, the essence of the dependent..." shows that in those original scriptures what is called the essence of the dependent nature is referred to as nondual gnosis. This is made clear, when he says, "It has a nature different from the objects of the existence and all elaborations."

> ci ste de nyid gzhan dbang ngo zhe na / de bas ches 'di ngo mtshar che zhes bya ste / rnal 'byor spyod pa'i gzhung las 'byung ba'i 'gyur med yongs grub kyi don ma go ba'am / la la dag gis ni go yang phyin ci log tu bton par zad do /

But is suchness really the dependent nature? It is chiefly because of this that this is a great wonder. Either you don't understand the meaning of the changeless perfected nature as described in the Yogācāra scriptures, or some of you do, but wilfully misrepresent it.

> yang khyed cag gis de der sgrub pa'i gtan tshigs gnyis pa ma grub ste / dbyig gnyen zhabs kyis mdo sde'i rgyan dang / 'byed gnyis te gsum ka dbu mar bkral ba'i tshul ni de dag gi 'grel pa na shin tu gsal ba'i phyir /

Next, your second argument proving that [the three intermediate scriptures are of the Mind Only] is unestablished, for it is very clear in the commentaries on the *Sūtrālaṅkāra* and the two *Vibhaṅgas* that Vasubandhu interpreted them as Madhyamaka treatises.

> gal te de nas bshad pa'i dbu ma de sems tsam mo zhe na / 'o na lugs der sems tsam la dbu ma zhes 'dogs na de las logs su sems tsam gyi mtshan gzhi med pa'am / yod na gang yin / med na ni lugs der grub mtha' smra ba bzhi'i dbye ba mi 'chad par 'gyur la / de'i mtshan gzhi sems tsam rnam bden pa 'o zhe na / de nyid kyi phyir rnam rdzun pa dbu ma par grub ste / sems tsam pa'i grub mtha' bkag nas rjes thob tu rang lugs 'jog pa'i phyir dang / sems tsam las gong du gyur pa'i grub mtha' smra ba yin pa'i phyir /

Objection

—But Madhyamaka explained in that way is really just Mind Only.

— If thus, according to that tradition, it is Mind Only that is called Madhyamaka, then is there nothing to be called Mind Only apart from this or, if there is, then what is it? If there isn't, no category of the four tenets was attributed to that tradition.

—It refers to true aspectarian Mind Only (Satyākāravāda-Cittamātra)

— It is for that very reason that it is established as false aspectarian Madhyamaka because, having rejected the doctrine of Mind Only, it establishes its own tradition in post-meditation, and because it is a doctrine that supercedes Mind Only.

> gal te dbu ma pas bltas pa na 'di sems tsam pa'o zhe na / ma yin te / rnam rdzun pa 'di la sems tsam par 'chad pa'i khungs thub kyi lung med cing / dbu ma par ston pa'i lung ni dbus dang mtha' rnam par 'byed pa 'di yod pa'i phyir / gzhan yang rnal 'byor spyod pa par bshad pa tsam gyis sems tsam par 'grub na ni / zhi ba 'tsho dpon slob la sogs rnal 'byor spyod pa'i dbu ma pa mtha' dag sems tsam pa nyid du thal bar 'gyur ro /

(Objection): —From the point of view of Madhyamaka this is Mind Only.

Not so, for there is no authentic scripture describing this false aspectarian position as Mind Only, while the *Madhyāntavibhāga* does explain it as being Madhyamaka. Moreover, if only explaining it as belonging to Yogācāra is sufficient to determine it as being Mind Only, then it follows that Śantarakṣita, his disciple [Kamalaśīla] and all the Yogācāra-Mādhyamikas are Cittamātrins.

> gnyis [11] pa rang lugs gzhag pa la gnyis te / 'chad byed chos lnga'i go rim nges pa dang / bshad bya nges don gyi ngos 'dzin ma nor ba'o /

1.2. Statement of Śākya mchog ldan's own position

Second, the statement of the author’s position has two parts: ascertaining the order of the five treatises, and recognizing the final meaning of their contents without error.

dang po la gnyis te/ bshad bya mdo'i go rim nges pa dang / des 'chad byed bstan bcos kyi go rim kyang 'grub pa'o /

1.2.1 The proper order of the Five Treatises

The first has two parts: the proper order of the contents, the *sūtras*, and the order of the treatises that explain them.

dang po ni / chos lnga po 'di'i bshad bya'i bka' ni gnyis te / 'khor lo bar pa mtshan nyid kyi 'khor lo dang / tha ma legs par rnam par phye ba dang ldan pa'i chos kyi 'khor lo'o /

1.2.1.1 The proper order of the sūtras explained by the Five Treatises

First, the subject explained by these five dharmas has two parts: the middle turning of characteristics and the turning of the final fully disclosed dharma.

de la'ang gnyis te / zab rgyud bla ma'i mdo dang / rgya che ba mngon pa'i mdo'o /

These can also be subdivided as the profound sūtras of the *Uttaratantra* and the vast *sūtra*s of manifest knowledge (*Abhidharma*).

dang po ni snying po'i mdo bcu lta bu la bya la / gnyis pa ni rnal 'byor spyod pa'i mdo stong phrag brgya pa lta bu'o /

The first, the sūtras pertaining to the profound, are the ten buddha nature sūtras, and the second (*Abhidharma sūtras*) are the one hundred thousand Yogācāra *sūtras*.

yang na chos lnga po'i bshad bya'i mdo ni gnyis te / mdo sde dang / mngon pa'o /

Alternatively, the sūtras explained by these Five Treatises are of two categories, *Sūtra* and *Abhidharma*.

dang po la gnyis te / zab pa dang rgya che ba’o /

The first (Sūtra) has two subdivisions : profound and vast.

dang po la gnyis te / nges don gtan la 'bebs byed kyi mdo dang / des gtan la phab pa'i nges don ngos 'dzin gyi mdo'o /

The first (profound) has two subdivisions: sūtras establishing the definitive meaning and sūtras pertaining to the direct recognition of the meaning established by those.

dang po ni shes phyin gyi mdo lta bu dang / gnyis pa ni don dam rnam nges gyi mdo dang snying po'i mdo'i lta bu'o /

The first include *sūtras* like the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*, the second refer to *sūtras* like the *Ascertainment of the Definitive*[285] and the buddha nature *sūtras.*

gnyis pa ni / byang sa'i bshad bya'i mdo rnams lta bu'o /

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[285] I.e. the *Saṃdhinirmocana*.

The second (vast) are sūtras explained by the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*.

> chos mngon pa la yang zab pa dang rgya che ba gnyis las / dang po ni theg bsdus kyi bshad bya'i mdo rnams dang / gnyis pa ni mngon pa kun las btus dang sa sde lnga'i bshad bya'i mdo rnams so /

Abhidharma sūtras include the very profound and the vast; the first refer to the sūtras explained by the *Mahāyānasaṅgraha*, the second to sūtras explained by the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* and the sūtras that are explained by the five treatises on the *Bhūmis.*

> gnyis pa bstan bcos kyi go rim nges pa'i tshul ni / mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan ni chos lnga'i thog mar bstan pa yin te / 'khor lo bar pa'i mdo dang / stong pa nyid gtan la 'bebs byed kyi mdo'i dgongs 'grel du mdzad pa'i phyir /

1.2.1.2 The order of the Treatises

Second, the way of ascertaining the order of the Five Treatises is as follows: the first of the Five Treatises is the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, because it was composed as a commentary on the intent of sūtras establishing the meaning of the sūtras of the middle turning and of emptiness.

> de'i 'og tu theg pa chen po [12] mdo sde'i rgyan mdzad pa yin te / lta ba'i cha bka' tha ma'i chos mngon pa nas 'byung ba dang / spyod pa'i cha mdo sna tshogs kyi dgongs 'grel du mdzad pa'i phyir dang / 'khor lo bar pa sangs rgyas kyi bkar sgrubs nas der bshad pa'i nges don mthar thug ni bka' tha mar bkral ba 'di yin no zhes ngos bzung ba'i phyir /

After that comes the *Mahāyānasūtrālāṅkāra*, because for the view it follows the *Abhidharma* of the final turning, and from the point of view of practice it is made as a commentary on the intent of the sūtras of various categories. Moreoever, having established the middle turning as the words of the Buddha, it identifies the ultimate meaning explained in these sūtras as what is interpreted in the final turning.

> de'i 'og tu rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos mdzad pa yin te / rgyan gnyis nas 'byung ba'i nges don mthar thug de nyid sangs rgyas kyi snying po'i dgongs gzhir bzhag nas des sems can thams cad la khyab pa dang / mthar thug theg pa gcig tu bshad pas na bka' tha ma'i yang tha ma dag gi dgongs 'grel du mdzad pa'i phyir / de'i bshad byed kyang ji srid stong pa nyid kyi yul rgyas par bstan ma zin pa de srid du de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po dang mthar thug theg pa gcig ston par mi mdzad pa'i phyir ro /

Then, the UT was composed because, having posited the ultimate definitive meaning of the two *Ālaṅkāras* as the intended basis of buddha nature, by explaining it as pervading all sentient beings and as the final one vehicle, it was composed as a commentary on the intent of finalmost [teachings] of the final turning.

> de'i 'og tu dbus dang mtha' rnam par 'byed pa'i bstan bcos mdzad pa yin te / mngon rtogs rgyan gyi nges don mdo sde'i rgyan gyis ngos bzung ba de nyid dbu ma'i lam du bshad nas de nyid mdo sde nas 'byung ba'i spyod pa dang sbyar nas / ji ltar sgom pa'i rim pa ston pa'i don de mdzad pa'i phyir /

Fourth is the *Madhyāntavibhāga,* for in it the meaning established in the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, which is directly recognized by the *Sūtrālāṅkāra*, is explained as the path of the Middle Way and joined with the conduct taught in the sūtras, as well as the exposition of the way to gradually cultivate it.

> de'i 'og tu chos dang chos nyid rnam par 'byed pa'i bstan bcos mdzad pa yin te / der ni theg pa chen po rgyud bla ma'i nges don de nyid ji ltar sgom pa'i rim pa ston pa'i don du mdzad pa'i phyir /

Fifth is the *Dharmadharmatāvibhaṅga*, for that text was composed in order to expound the definitive meaning of the *Uttaratantra* following the stages of its cultivation.

> 'o na dbus mtha' rnam 'byed kyis rgyud bla ma'i nges don sgom pa'i rim pa mi ston pa ci zhe na / der ma rig bag chags kyi sa dang zag med kyi las shes bya ba'i rnam gzhag dang / de sbyong byed kyi sgrub pa yang ma bshad la / mthar thug theg pa gsum gyi tshul las ma 'das pa'i phyir /

(Objection) —But why do you say that the *Madhyāntavibhāga* does not teach the stages of cultivation of the final meaning of the *Uttaratantra*?

—As it does not explain the presentation of the disposition of ignorance and so-called stainless action, that treatise does not go beyond the approach of the three final yānas.

> chos dang [13] chos nyid rnam par 'byed par ni gnas gyur mthar phyin pa theg pa chen po kho na la bshad pa na / mthar thug theg pa gcig nyid du bshad par

> gsal[286] bas dman pa'i lhag med myang 'das na ma rig bag chags kyi sa yod pas de'i dbang gis skye ba len zhing theg pa chen po'i lam du 'jug pa dang / chos nyid goms pa'i stobs kyis de spong nus par[287] 'chad pa'i phyir /

In the *Dharmadharmatāvibhaṅga,* the ultimate transformation of the basis is explained only in relation to the great vehicle. Since, by clearly explaining that [transformation] as the single vehicle, the ground of disposition to ignorance exists in the *nirvāṇa* without residue of the lower vehicle, it is due to the power of that [disposition] that [individuals who have entered that nirvāṇa] take birth, enter the great vehicle, and by cultivation of suchness, are able to abandon that [disposition]. Thus is it explained.

> gnyis pa chos lnga'i nges don ngos bzung ba ni / thog mar mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan gyi dngos bstan ni gzung 'dzin gnyis kyis stong pa'i med par dgag pa ste 'khor lo bar pa'i mdor dngos su bstan pa de nyid do /

2. Identification of the Definitive Meaning of the Five Treatises

Second, the identification of the final meaning of the five treatises: first, the exposition of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* is the non-implicative negation free of the grasping to subject and object, and is exposed following the sūtras of the middle turning.

> de tsam ni nges pa'i don du mi rung ste / ldog pa gzhan sel gyi cha las ma 'das pas rtog pa'i[288] dngos yul kho nar nges kyi / so sor rang gi rig pa'i ye shes kyi

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[286] MS: "bsal".
[287] MS: "par".

spyod yul du mi rung ba'i phyir de bas na de'i nges don mthar thug pa ni mdo sde'i rgyan dang dbus mtha' rnam 'byed du ngos bzung ba gang yin pa de nyid la bya ste / 'khor lo bar pa'i nges don ni 'khor lo tha mar ngos 'dzin pa la rag las pa'i phyir /

This alone does not constitute the definitive meaning, because, although it is ascertained simply as the object of conception, – as it does not go beyond exclusion – it is not suitable as the object of self-aware gnosis and, hence, its final definitive meaning, which is also directly recognized in the *Sūtrālāṅkāra* and the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, is explained in those texts, because the final meaning of the middle turning is [determined] in dependence upon its recognition in the final turning.

de yang gang zhe na / gzung 'dzin gnyis su med pa'i ye shes shig yin la / de la'ang chos can gyi cha dang / chos nyid kyi cha gnyis las phyi ma kho na ste / mdo sde'i rgyan du / chos nyid sems las gzhan pa sems gzhan ni / 'od gsal ma yin rang bzhin la brjod do[289] / zhes dang / dbus mthar stong pa nyid kyi mtshan nyid 'chad pa na / gnyis dngos med pa'i dngos med pa'i dngos po[290] / zhes gsungs bas so /

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[288] MS: "stog".
[289] *Sūtrālāṅkāra*, 13, 20. "mataṃ ca cittaṃ prakṛtiprabhāsvaraṃ sadā tadāgantukadoṣadūṣitaṃ / *na dharmatācittamṛte 'nyacetasaḥ prabhāsvaratvaṃ prakṛtau vi dhīyate* / " sDe dge phi, 18B, "sems ni rtag tu rang bzhin 'od gsal 'dod / de ni glo bur nyes pas ma rungs byas / chos nyid sems las gzhan pa'i sems gzhan ni / 'od gsal ma yin rang bzhin la brjod do /". The passage is quoted incorrectly in BCN ("gzhan pa" instead of "gzhan pa'i").
[290] Probably a rephrase of MV, 1, 21, "pudgalasyātha dharmāṇāmabhāvaḥ śūnytā'tra hi / tadbhāvasya sabhāvastasmin sā śūnyatā'parā /" sDe dge phi, 41a, "gang zag dang ni chos rnams kyi / dngos po med 'dir stong pa nyid / de dngos med pa'i dngos yod pa / de ni de las stong nyid gzhan /".

What is it then? It is devoid of dualistic grasping, and of the aspects of phenomenon and nature, it is the latter. As the *Sūtrālāṅkāra* says, "The luminous mind is not different from natural mind. Clarity is not some mind other than the mind of reality," and the *Madhyāntavibhaṅga* says that when giving the definition of emptiness, it is "the reality which is devoid of the reality of the person and phenomena."

> de lta yin pa'i de'i phyir gzhung de gsum gyis bstan pa'i mthar thug gi lta ba ngos 'dzin tshul la khyad par ci yang yod pa ma yin zhing / spyod pas nyams su len pa'i tshul ston lugs la ni khyad par med pa ma yin te / [14] mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan du ni shes phyin gyi mdo'i shugs bstan mngon rtogs kyi rim pa de nyid dngos bstan stong nyid kyi rim pa dang sbyar nas nyams su len pa'i tshul gyis bshad la / gzhan gnyis su ni 'khor lo bar pa'i nges don 'khor lo tha mas ngos bzung ba de nyid 'khor lo tha ma'i mdo sde mang po nas 'byung ba'i spyod pa'i phyogs dang sbyar nas nyams su len pa'i tshul gyis bshad pa'i phyir /

That being so, the way these three scriptures recognize the final view is not different in the slightest, nor is their way of teaching its application, and it is not the case that there is no difference in the way they teach the way of practicing it in one's conduct, for in the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, the stages of realization implied in the *Prajñāpāramitā* are explained according to practice, together with the stages of emptiness as the direct exposition of suchness. In the other two treatises, the final meaning of the middle turning, recognized according to the final turning, together with the topic of the

conduct described in many *sūtras* of the final turning, is explained from the point of view of application.

> rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos kyi nges pa'i don rang gi ngo bo ni bstan bcos gsum po de'i nges don gyi ngo bo dang khyad par ci yang yod pa ma yin te / mdo sde'i rgyan dang dbus mtha' gnyis su mtshan nyid gsum gyi sgo nas gtan la phab pa'i nges don de nyid 'dir bshad pa las gzhan ma yin pa'i phyir dang / mdo sde'i rgyan du gzhan dbang sgyu ma lta bur ston pa'i rigs pa sngon du ma song na rgyud bla nas 'byung ba'i snying po ngos mi zin pa'i phyir /

There is not the slightest difference between the essential definitive meaning of the *Uttaratantra* and that of the three [intermediate] treatises, for the definitive meaning, which is established in the *Sūtrālāṅkāra* and in the *Madhyāntavibhāga* by way of the three natures, is not different from what is explained here [in the *Uttaratantra*], and because if one does not first understand the arguments expounding the dependent nature to be illusory found in the *Sūtrālāṅkāra*, one will not recognize the essential meaning of the *Uttaratantra*.

> de lta na yang 'chad tshul ni mi 'dra ste / gzhung de gnyis su ni de 'dra de nges don mthar thug tu bstan pa ma gtogs / de'i yon tan gyi cha nas bshad pa med la / 'dir ni de nyid la gnas skabs kyi dbye bas rdo rje rnam pa bdun du 'jog pa'i tshul dang / gzhi dus kyi ye shes de nyid sbyang gzhir gzhag nas lam dus su sbyang bya'i dri ma dgu sbyangs pa las 'bras bu sangs rgyas kyi ye shes su gnas 'gyur ba'i tshul gyis bshad pa'i phyir /

That being said, their methods of explanation are different: in those two scriptures (i.e., in the *Sūtrālāṅkāra* and *Madhyāntavibhāga*), except for the fact that the[definitive meaning] is explained as the final meaning, while there is no explanation made as to its qualities, here [in the UT] suchness is explained by being posited through distinctions between different circumstances (*skabs)* as the seven-fold vajra. Second, having posited the gnosis of the time of the ground as the basis of purification of suchness, one explains it in the way of transformation into the gnosis of the resulting buddhahood that comes from the purification of the nine stains to be purified on the path.

> bstan bcos lnga pa chos dang chos nyid rnam par 'byed pa'i gzhung gis bstan pa'i nges don ni chos nyid ces bya de yin la / de'i ngos 'dzin kyang rgyan dang dbus mthar gtan la phab pa de nyid yin te / sbyang gzhi gzhan dbang gi steng du dgag bya gzung 'dzin kun btags gnyis kyis stong pa'i dngos po la bshad pa'i phyir /

The definitive meaning taught in the fifth treatise, the *Dharmadharmatāvibhaṅga*, is called *dharmatā*. The direct recognition of this is the suchness which is established in the *Sūtrālāṅkāra* and the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, because the ground of purification [superimposed] on the dependent nature is there explained as reality empty of the object of negation, i.e., the two of imputations of subject and object.

> de lta na yang gzhung snga ma [15] gnyis dang bzlos pa ma yin te / der ni lta ba gtan la phab nas spyod pa pha rol tu phyin pa drug dang / theg pa chen po'i

sems bskyed sogs bskal pa grangs med pa dag tu goms par byed pa'i tshul bstan pa yin la 'dir ni chos nyid rkyang pa yid la byed pa 'i cha nas bstan pa'i phyir ro /

Thus, this is not a repetition of the first two treatises for, whereas in those two, after establishing the view, the conduct is expounded in the manner of cultivation of the six perfections and of the *bodhicitta* for countless eons, only in this one (the *Dharmadharmatāvibhaṅga*) is it expounded from the point of view of the contemplation of suchness.

mdor na byams pa'i chos 'dir lta ba gtan la 'bebs pa'i tshe / gang yod pa yin na chos kyi dbyings dang stong pa nyid yin dgos la / de yin na gzung 'dzin gnyis kyis stong pa'i ye shes bya ba yongs grub kyi ming can de yin dgos so / 'o na gnas tshul gyis sa sku'i yon tan rnams kyang der 'gyur la / de lta na rgyu rkyen gyis gsar du byas pa ma yin par 'gyur ro zhe na / ma yin pa ni 'dod pa nyid de / chos nyid kyi ye shes dri ma dang bral ba'i tshe chos can gyi ye shes gsar du byung ba lta bur mngon pa yin gyi / sangs rgyas kyi sa'i yon tan ji snyed pa rdzas kyi sgo nas chos nyid dang dbye ba med pa'i phyir / de skad du yang / sku lhag ma gsum po don dam par chos nyid kyi ngo bo nyis kyis[291] / zhes 'byung ba ltar ro /

[291] Unidentified citation.

In short, when establishing the view of the Five Treatises, whatever exists needs to be explained as *dharmadhātu* and emptiness. That is necessarily what we call gnosis empty of dualistic grasping, which is also called the perfected nature.

(Objection:) –But then it follows that even the qualities of the grounds and *kāyas*, since they are like that too, are not made anew by causes and conditions.

–Not so for, although the gnosis of *dharmadhātu*, when it is free of all defilements, appears as if were a new objective gnosis, all the qualities of the Buddha-*bhūmis*, in essence, are not different from suchness. As it is said, "The three remainder bodies are ultimately of the nature of suchness...."

> gnyis pa[292] byams chos lnga po thogs med mched kyis ji ltar bkral ba'i tshul la / dbu sems kyi khyad par zhib mor phye ba dang / des na dbu mar bkral kyang rang stong smra ba dang mi mthun pa'i tshul lo /

3. Asaṅga and Vasubandhu's interpretation of the Five Treatises

The way the Five Treatises are commented on by Asaṅga and his brother has two parts: 1) disclosing the subtle difference between Madhyamaka and Cittamātra, and 2) how it follows that although they are explained as Madhyamaka they do not agree with self-emptiness.

> dang po ni / theg pa chen po'i dbu ma 'chad tshul la gnyis te / rang stong sgo nas dang / gzhan stong gi sgo nas 'chad tshul lo / dang po ni spros pa'i mtha'

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[292] Although he introduces this section with "second", in the beginning of the text (BCN, 2), Śākya mchog ldan refers to this section as the third part of the text, following the section on the order (1) and that on the definitive meaning of the Five Treatises (2). I have adapted the numbering of sections accordingly.

thams cad bkag pa'i shul na dbu[293] ma zhes bya ba'i dngos po ci yang lus ba med pa zhig la dbu ma zhes bya ba'i tha snyad btags pa tsam yin te / rang gi ngo bos mi stong pa'i shes bya mi srid pa'i phyir / gnyis pa ni [16] gzung 'dzin gnyis med pa dang / gnyis med kyi ye shes yod pa ste de lta bu'i sgro skur gyi mtha' gnyis bsal ba'i shul na yod pa'i dngos po zhig la ni dbu ma zhes bya la / ming gi rnam grangs de bzhin nyid dang yang dag pa'i mtha la sogs pa rnams so /

3.1 Subtle difference between Madhyamaka and Mind Only.

There are two ways of explaining the Mahāyāna Madhyamaka[294]: by way of self-emptiness and other-emptiness. First, Madhyamaka explained by self-emptiness : when all the elaborated extremes have been eliminated, the reality called “middle” is labelled “Madhyamaka” with regard to anything without exception, for it is impossible for any object of knowledge to exist while not being empty of its own essence. Second [following other-emptiness], when both forms of clinging are absent and non dual gnosis is present, and thus the extremes of superimposition and depreciation are eliminated, what remains is called "Madhyamaka", whose synonyms are suchness, the final limit, etc.

de la'ang gnyis te / mthar thug theg pa gsum du 'chad pa dbu ma 'bring po dang / mthar thug theg pa gcig tu ston pa dbu ma chen po'o / de ltar gnyis kyi zlas phye ba'i dbu ma chung ngu ni gang zag gi bdag med la mtha' gnyis sel ba'i dbang du byas la / gzhan gnyis ni chos kyi bdag med kho na'i dbang du byas so /

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[293] MS: “dbus ma”.
[294] Cf. *dBu ma'i byung tshul,* where Śākya mchog ldan defines “Madhyamaka” or Middle Way to include all Buddhist systems of doctrine, thus necessitating the label “Mahāyāna Madhyamaka”.

> de ltar dbu ma'i tshul lugs gnyis las / gcig ni klu sgrub zhabs kyis phye ba'i lam srol dang / gcig ni thogs[295] med zhabs kyi phye ba'i lam srol te de ltar na zhing rta'i srol chen rnam pa gnyis so shes 'jog pa ni tha snyad sbyar bde ba'i dbang du byas la / zhib mor na klu sgrub dang A rya de ba'i gzhung gzhan stong gi srol du drangs pa dang / mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan rang stong gi srol du drangs pa gnyis ka yod pa las cig shos dbu mar gnas pa yin no zhes ni 'chad par nus pa ma yin no /

You can also classifiy Madhyamaka into two categories in the following way: intermediate Madhyamaka explained as the final three *yānas* and Great Madhyamaka explained as the final one *yāna*. So the opposite of those two, small Madhyamaka, is concerned with eliminating the two extremes regarding the selflessness of persons, and the other two are concerned with the selflessness of phenomena. Thus, of the two ways of explaining Madhyamaka, one is the tradition founded by Nāgārjuna, one that of Asaṅga; hence positing that these are the two traditions is done simply as a useful convention. In a more refined way, because there are both interpretation of the scriptures of Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva as representing the tradition of other-emptiness and interpretations of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* as representing the tradition of self-emptiness, you cannot explain either system as representing one form of Madhyamaka more than the other.

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[295]MS: "thog med"

de'i shes byed kyang thogs med zhabs kyis phye ba'i dbu ma la zla ba'i zhabs kyis dbu ma ma yin no zhes bsnyad pa yod mod / rang stong smra ba'i lta ba la thogs med zhabs kyis dbang za ba'i lta ba dang / skur ba [296] 'debs pa'i lta ba zhes bsnyad pa yod pa kho nar ma zad / rje btsun nyid kyi zhal snga nas / gnas gyur gyi rten med pa la nyes pa bzhi brjod par mdzad pa'o / de 'i phyir byams chos phyi ma bzhi'i nges don ni grub mtha' smra ba bzhi'i rtse mor gyur pa'i dbu ma pa zhes bya ba de'i gzhung du gnas pa yin te / de der gnas pa rje btsun nyid kyis gsungs pa ltar thogs med mched kyis bkral ba'i phyir ro /

Even in Madhyamaka treatises, although Candrakīrti says that the Madhyamaka disclosed by Asaṅga is not really Madhyamaka, Asaṅga not only does not say that self-emptiness Madhyamaka is a presumptuous and depreciating view, but The lord [Maitreya] himself said that "in the absence of revolution of the basis (*āśraya-paravṛtti)*, there are four faults." Hence the final meaning of the four latter teachings of Maitreya, the Madhyamaka that is the peak of the four doctrines, is found in those scriptures, because it was explained so by Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, just as the Lord [Maitreya] himself said it.

gnyis pa la gnyis te / dbyig gnyen zhabs kyis gzhung gsum sems tsam du ma bkral bar bstan / thogs med zhabs kyis rgyud bla'i dgongs pa dbu ma dang / dbyig gnyen zhabs kyis yum gyi mdo dang rgyan gyi dgongs pa dbu mar bkral yang rang stong gi tshul dang mthun pa ma yin pa'o /

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[296] MS: sku ra pa

3.2 Although it is explained as Madhyamaka, it does not agree with the proponents of self-emptiness (summary of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu's commentaries on the Five Treatises)

The second part has two subjects: Vasubandhu did not expound the three treatises as Cittamātra and Asaṅga explained the *Uttaratantra* as Madhyamaka, and Vasubandhu, although he explained the intent of the sūtras of the *Prajñāpāramitā* and the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* as Madhyamaka, did not do so in agreement with self-emptiness.

> dang po ni / des de dag der bkral ba ma yin te / mdo sde'i rgyan las / der snang sems tsam la ni yang dag nas / de nas chos dbyings gnyis kyi mtshan nyid dang / bral ba mngon sum nyid du rtogs par 'gyur / sems las gzhan med par ni blos rig nas / de nas sems kyang med pa nyid du rtogs / blo dang ldan pas gnyis po med rig nas / de mi ldan pa'i chos kyi dbyings la gnas[298] / shes dang /

Asaṅga and Vasubandhu do not explain the three treatises and the *Uttaratantra* as Mind Only. As the *Sūtrālāṅkāra* says,

> What appears there is truly Mind Only / Hence *dharmadhātu* is realized as devoid of the essence of duality / Since mind understands it as not being different from mind / Even mind is realized as not existing / Intelligent ones understand that neither exist / Hence those without [duality] rest in dharmadhatu /

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[298] *Sūtrālāṅkāra*, 6, 7, "arthānsa vijñāya ca jalpamātrān saṃṭiṣṭhate tannibhacittamātre / pratyakṣa tāmeti ca dharmadhātustasmādviyuktodvayalakṣaṇena /" Tib., D Phi, 6b, "der snang sems tsam la ni yang dag nas / de nas chos dbyings gnyis kyi mtshan nyid dang / bral ba mngon sum nyid du rtogs par 'gyur /"

dbus mtha' las / dmigs pa la ni brten nas su / mi dmigs pa ni rab tu skye / mi dmigs pa la brten nas su / mi dmigs pa ni rab tu skye[299] / zhes dang /

The *Madhyāntavibhāga* says,

Relying on apprehension /non apprehension is produced / by relying on non apprehension / non apprehension perfectly arises.

chos nyid rnam 'byed du / de ltar dmigs pa las ni rnam par rig tsam du dmigs pa la 'jug go / rnam par rig pa tsam dmigs pa las ni don thams cad mi dmigs pa la 'jug go / don thams cad mi dmigs pa las ni rnam par rig pa tsam mi dmigs pa la 'jug go /

the *Dharmadharmatāvibhaṅga* says,

Because of such an apprehension, consciousness only becomes apprehended. From contemplating consciousness-only, all objects are unapprehended. From non apprehension of all objects, consciousness only is not apprehended.

ces gsungs pa'i sgra ji bzhin pa de nyid las ji ltar gsal ba de bzhin du / de dag gi 'grel pa na yang de kho na ltar yod pa'i phyir ro /

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[299] MV, 1, 6. Cf. above, n.6.

Just as these words as they are make this very clear, the commentaries on these texts explain these points in just the same way.

> de'i phyir gzhung de gsum gyi nges don gyi lta ba sems tsam las brgal bar bshad pa na dbu ma las gzhan du yod pa ma yin te / ji skad du / thub pa'i dgongs pa lnga pa med / ces 'byung ba'i phyir ro /

Therefore, the definitive view of these three treatises (*Sūtrālāṅkāra*, *Madhyāntavibhāga*, and *Dharmadharmatāvibhaṅga*), while explained as transcending Mind Only, is not some view other than that of Madhyamaka. For it is said, "There is no fifth [system of] intent of the Buddha."

> gal te 'o na ye shes snying po kun las btus par / gzung dang 'dzin pa las grol ba'i / ye shes dam pa'i don du yod[300] / ces bshad zin pa'i 'og tu / rnam shes de yang don dam du / yod par mkhas rnams mi 'dod de / zhes sogs gsungs pas snga ma [18] sems tsam du bstan pa ma yin nam zhe na /

(Objection:) After the *Jñānagarbhasamuccaya* says, "Superior wisdom, which is free of dualistic grasping, really exists", it explains, "Learned ones do not accept even that consciousness to exist ultimately." Hence was it not, before that, taught as Mind Only?

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[300] *Ye shes snying po'i kun las btus pa*, (attributed to Āryadeva), dBu ma tsa, 27b.

ma yin te / rnam shes bden par mi 'dod pa ni gzhan stong smra ba'i dbu ma pa dag gi grub mtha'i rtsa ba yin pa'i phyir /

No, for not accepting consciousness as being truly real is the very root of the tenet of the Madhyamaka of other-emptiness.

gzhung de la brtags pa na sems tsam pa la rnam bden rdzun gnyis su 'byed[301] pa ni ma yin gyi / dbu ma pa la gzhan stong smra ba dang rang stong smra ba gnyis su phye nas ston par gsal yin te / de ltar bshad na thag (theg) pa chen pa (po)'i gzhung lugs 'chad pa po kun dang 'thig pa'i phyir dang / rnal spyod pa (+pa) yin pa tsam gyis sems tsam par smra na ha cang thal ba'i phyir dang / sems tsam pa'i 'dod pa ni / yan lag can zhes bya ba med / ces pa'i sho lo ka gcig pus bstan zin pa'i phyir /

When you inquire into these scriptures, although dividing Mind Only in the two categories of true and false aspectarian Mind Only is not done, you can explain [their meaning] clearly by making the distinction between other-emptiness Madhyamaka and self-emptiness Madhyamaka, for three reasons: if you explain it in that way, you disagree with all the exponents of the scriptural traditions of the Mahāyāna; propounding that simply being a Yogācārin makes you a proponent of the Mind Only is extremely absurd; and because there is only one verse that says "The position of the Mind Only is without subdivisions."

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[301] MS: "byed pa"

mdor na sems tsam pa la rnam bden rdzun dang / dbu ma pa la thal rang gnyis su 'byed pa ni 'phags yul gyi grub mtha' rnam dbye la yod pa ma yin te / lung gis ma dmigs pa'i phyir dang / rigs pas kyang mi 'thad pa ni / grub mtha'i rnam dbye byed pa ni lta ba'i cha nas yin pa las / dbu ma thal rang gnyis la / lta ba'i khyad par ma dmigs pa'i phyir /

In short, the divisions of true and false aspectarian Mind Only and of Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika did not exist in Indian doxography, because they do not refer to scriptures. They do not even follow reason because, while the making of doxographical categories is made according to views, there is no difference in view between Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka.

de lta mod kyi dbu ma pa la rang gzhan ston pa'i tshul lugs gnyis su 'byed pa ni shing rta' srol chen gnyis kyi gzhung na legs par gsal lo /

Even so, making the distinction between the two ways of expressing Madhyamaka as either self or other-emptiness is very clear in the scriptures of the two great traditions.

gnyis pa la gnyis te / sku mched gnyis kyis rgyan dang rgyud bla'i dgongs pa sems tsam du ma bkral ba dang / de lta na yang rang stong smra ba dang mi mthun par bkral ba'i tshul lo /

3.2.1 Asaṅga explained the meaning of the Uttaratantra as Madhyamaka and Vasubandhu explained the Prajñāpāramitā and the Abhisamayālaṅkāra as Madhyamaka.

The second part has two subjects: how the two brothers commented on the intended meaning of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* and the *Uttaratantra* as not representing Mind Only and, even so, as not agreeing with self-emptiness Madhyamaka.

> dang po ni / slob dpon de dag gis gzhung lugs de dag der bkral ba ma yin te / thogs med zhabs kyis ni rgyud bla'i 'grel par / sems can 'tshang rgya ba dang / mthar thug theg pa gcig yin pa dang / nyan rang gi lhag med nas theg pa chen po'i lam du 'jug pa dang / [19] rnal 'byor spyod pa pa'i gzhung du ma grags pa'i spang bya shes sgrib kyi rnam par gzhag pa dang / de spong byed kyi nyen po ye shes kyi rnam par gzhag pa dag rgya cher mdzad pa'i phyir dang / dbyig gnyen zhabs kyi yum gsum gnod 'joms su yang don de dag gsal bar 'byung ba'i phyir ro /

First those two teachers did not comment on these two scriptures as Mind Only, for in the commentary on the *Uttaratantra*, Asaṅga treats extensively the topics of the awakening of sentient beings, the final *Ekayāna*, the entry into the Mahāyāna of the *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas* without exception, the establishment of the object of rejection, the osbcuration of knowledge, which is not known in Yogācārin scriptures, and of the antidote eliminating it, gnosis. And as for Vasubandhu, he clarifies these same topics even in his *Yum gsum gnod 'joms*.

> gnyis pa la gnyis te / dngos dang / rtsod pa spong ba'o / dang po ni / thogs med zhabs kyis rgyud bla rang stong gi tshul du bkral ba ma yin te / bla med chos kyi stong ma yin / zhes pa'i 'grel par / gang na gang med pa de ni des stong par yang dag pa ji lta ba bzhin du yang dag par rjes su mthong ngo / 'di la lhag ma yod pa gang yin pa de ni 'dir yod par yang dag pa ji lta ba bzhin du rab tu shes te / 'di ni stong pa nyid kyi mtshan nyid phyin ci log par bstan pa yin no / zhes gsungs pa'i phyir dang /

The second topic has two parts: the main exposition and the refutation of objections. First, Asaṅga did not comment on the *Uttaratantra* in the way of self-emptiness, for in the commentary on the line, "the unsurpassable dharma is not empty", he says, "It is utterly seen just as that in which something is absent is empty of that thing. Whatever remains in there is utterly known to be present in there. This is a mistaken definition of emptiness."

> gnod 'jomgs las kyang / yum gyi mdor / mig ni mid gis stong ngo / zhes sogs kyi don 'chad pa na / chos nyid kyi mig kun btags kyi mig gis stong pa sogs kyi don du gsal bar bshad pa'i phyir ro /

The *Gnod 'joms* says, "In short, the [meaning of the Great] Mother [*Prajñāpāramitā*] is that, if you explain the meaning of statements such as, "the eye is empty of eye", they mean that the reality-eye is empty of the imputed eye.

gal te gnyis ka yang dbu ma rnam dag tu smra ba de lta na / gnyis po la lta ba'i khyad par gang zhig yod / med na ni grub mtha' smra ba po sor 'jog pa mi 'thad do ce na /

(Objection) —But if you say that both views are Madhyamaka, there must still be some difference in view, lest it be irrational to present the proponents of these views separately.

de bshad pa ni / gnyis kas kyang mnyam gzhag tu lta bas spros pa gcod pa'i tshe mtshan ma gang yang yid la mi byed cing / so sor rtog pa'i shes rab nyid kyang ye shes kyi mes bsreg dgos nyid du bzhed par mtshungs kyang / rjes thob tu rang lugs su grub pa'i mtha' smra ba na / gnyis med kyi ye shes yod par khas len pa dang / de mi len pa'o / de bas na mnyam gzhag [20] tu spros pa gcod tshul la khyad par med pa de'i phyir lugs gnyis ka'i lta ba la shes sgrib kyi bag chags spong nus mi nus kyi khyad par dbye nus pa ma yin no /

(Answer)—Both of these [proponents of self-emptiness and other-emptiness], at the time of eliminating all extreme views in meditative absorption, are not fixated on anything. Yet, although they agree that the fire of gnosis must burn self-aware gnosis, at the time of defending their doctrine in post-meditation, they [differ in that] some accept the existence of non-dual gnosis and some don't. Hence, because of that lack of difference in the way of eliminating elaborations in meditative absorption, one cannot make distinctions between the two views as to whether or not they are able to eliminate the habitual tendency of the obscuration of knowledge.

de ltar bshad pas grub pa'i don ni / rang stong gi dbu ma smra ba la skur pa 'debs pa po de dag ni / ji skad du / yid kyi nyes pa rang bzhin gdug pa ste[302] / zhes pa'i skabs nas bstan pa'i chos spong gi nyes pa dang bcas pa kho nar ma zad / gzhan stong gi lta ba la smod par byed pa de dag kyang ni ji skad du / gang zhig yid ni chos la sdang ba de la[303] thar pa ga la yod / ces pa'i kha na ma tho ba dang bcas pa'o /

The result of such an explanation is that depreciators of the proponents of self-emptiness Madhyamaka–as it is said, "mind's fault has the nature of poison,"– entail, not only the fault of rejecting the teachings, but also of despising the view of other-emptiness. As it is said, "Where is liberation for one whose mind dislikes the teachings?" That is the fault that they incur.

de'i phyir gnas de dang de la bag yod par bya'o / zhes pha rol ru phyin pa'i theg pa pa dag kho nar ma zad / tshul chen gyi theg pa pa dag la'ang gtam du bya dgos pa yin te / gzhan stong gi tshul rnam par ma dag na thun mtshams su[304] lha'i nga rgyal dang ma bral ba zhes bya ba de mi 'byung zhing / gzung 'dzin thams cad stong par sbyangs zin pa'i 'og tu / stong nyid kyi ye shes kyi rdo rje'i bdag nyid nga yin / zhes bya ba de yang rnam par ma dag pa nyid du thal ba'i phyir dang / rang stong gi tshul 'di rnam par dag na gya nom lhar zhen gyi rtog

[302] Unidentified citation.
[303] MS: “dal ba”
[304] MS: “du”

pa spong mi nus pa'i phyir dang / shes bya thams cad kyi gnas lugs gtan la mi phebs pa'i phyir ro /

Therefore, the warning, "be careful about these things," not only applies to followers of the Pāramitayāna, but can be said also of followers of the yāna of the great way [of other-emptiness], because they are wrong to say that "if the way of other-emptiness is not totally pure, in between sessions inseparability from the deity's pride does not arise." For the statement, "After one has purified as empty all clinging and grasping, [one should think], 'I am the lord of the vajra gnosis of emptiness'", would then not be completely pure and, if this way of self-emptiness was completely pure, it would be incapable of eliminating the conception of being a superior deity, and could not establish the nature of all knowables.

'o na chen po dag gis kyang nyes pa de dang de zhal gyis bzhes sam zhe na / ma yin te / thogs med zhabs kyis ni gnas skabs su don dam pa'i bden pa khas ma blangs na skur 'debs kyi lta bar 'gyur / zhes dang / zla bas ni mthar spros pa'i mtshan ma khas blangs na rtag pa'i lta bar 'gyur zhes gsungs pa tsam yin pa'i phyir ro / des na lta ba rang stong gi rgyas btab nas / sgom pa gzhan stong gi tshul bzhin du nyams su len pa ni klu sgrub yab sras kyi rang lugs [21] bla na med pa'o / rjes thob tu grub mtha' 'jog pa'i tshe gzhan stong khas len kyang / mnyam gzhag tu spros pa'i mtshan ma gang yang yid la mi byed par gsal rig gi ngang la mnyam par 'jog pa ni thogs med mched kyi ring lugs bla na med pa'o /

But then do even those great beings incur the fault in accepting this? No, for Asaṅga and Vasubandhu say that not accepting that view temporarily as the ultimate amounts to depreciation, and Candrakīrti said, "if one accepts a characteristic that is an extreme elaboration, that is the view of permanence." Thus, having sealed self-emptiness, to practice meditation in the manner of other-emptiness is the unsurpassed tradition of Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva. Even though accepting other-emptiness at the time of establishing one's doctrine in post-meditation, absorption in clear awareness within non-fixation on any elaborated characteristic is the unsurpassable tradition of Asaṅga and his brother.

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